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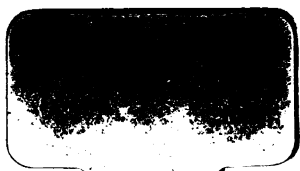
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A GARDEN OF GIRLS.

A GARDEN OF GIRLS.

BY

THEO. GIFT,

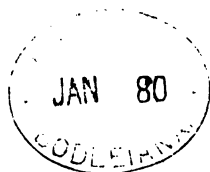
AUTHOR OF "PRETTY MISS BELLEW," "MAID ELLICE," "TRUE TO HER TRUST,"

"MORE THAN THE LOVE OF WOMAN," ETC. ETC.

"Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls."—TENNYSON (*Maud*).

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.



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WRITTEN TO DEATH

Continued.

WRITTEN TO DEATH.

CHAPTER XII.—(*Continued.*)

FOR a minute she did not utter a word. She was so utterly unprepared for it that it came on her almost like a shock: like finding oneself before a mirror where one has expected an open door; and, indeed, it was wonderfully like her—a most perfect portrait and picture in one, representing her life-size, seated in a boat, only the stern of which was visible, and gazing seaward with a dreamy wistful expression, the fair uncovered head standing out vividly against a sunset sky.

The remembrance, with the double revelation of the picture itself and of what it told, thus suddenly brought before her, was too much for even her self-command. Her face, which had grown very pale, flushed up suddenly crimson. She turned, and flashed a quick, almost reproachful, look on Wrayburn, her eyes full of tears, and her lip trembling like a child's. He came quickly to her side.

"Marion," he said, "are you angry? It is not like you—not good enough for you—but I could not have helped doing it. I have missed you so much since then—I wanted you so badly. Dear, will you forgive me?"

She looked up at him, the tears standing on her lashes.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said, softly.

"Not all I said to you before I knew—my harshness, my letter?"

"No, no, *you* were quite right; true and loyal all through. I could not like you if you had been otherwise, bad as the pain was. Oh! need we speak of it now that it is all done with and past? Indeed I have done my best."

The tears came so thick in her voice that she could not speak, and he put his hand on hers.

"You have done too much; you have beggared yourself, and it is my fault. Marion, why did you?"

But the look she gave him rebuked him by its simple, unaffected honesty.

"Hush! *you* would have done no less, and how could I? To have injured anyone so deeply, and not even to make that poor amends when one's heart was breaking over

it. Do you recollect what you said when you did not know who it was who wrote those articles? And it *was* I, remember!" her eyes widening with a sudden look of wistful pathos as she shrank back from his touch. "Nothing can alter *that*."

"No," said Wrayburn, quickly; but nothing—not even that—can alter *you* or make you one iota less than the gentlest, noblest, truest woman God ever sent upon this earth. Dear, I have loved you from the first day I saw you! I was not worthy of you then. I am less worthy of you now; but if you could—" he broke off, laying his hand on her shoulder. "Marion, do you remember one word you said to me in the boat that evening?"

"Yes."

She said it again, not looking at him, as then.

"Would you say it to me now if I asked you the same question? I do ask it, love, with all my heart."

But he got no answer this time, only Marion turned a little towards him; and he, looking straight down into the sweetness of her eyes, found no cause for any other word.

.
"The rain is over!" said Marion suddenly, a little while after. "Please to take me back this minute to Lady Caroline. No, sir, you are not to call her names. She is a dear old lady, and I love her. It was very good of her to give me a home till—you wanted me."

"But I have always wanted you. I want you now," Wrayburn answered, petulantly; and then they both stood for a moment hand in hand by the window, where

the last rays of the sun were streaming in through the green translucent fig-leaves and making a golden glitter among the rain drops on every shoot and spray ; and Marion said—

“And I want that dear little Georgie Baring. Dear, I think *we* must keep him altogether from to-day.”

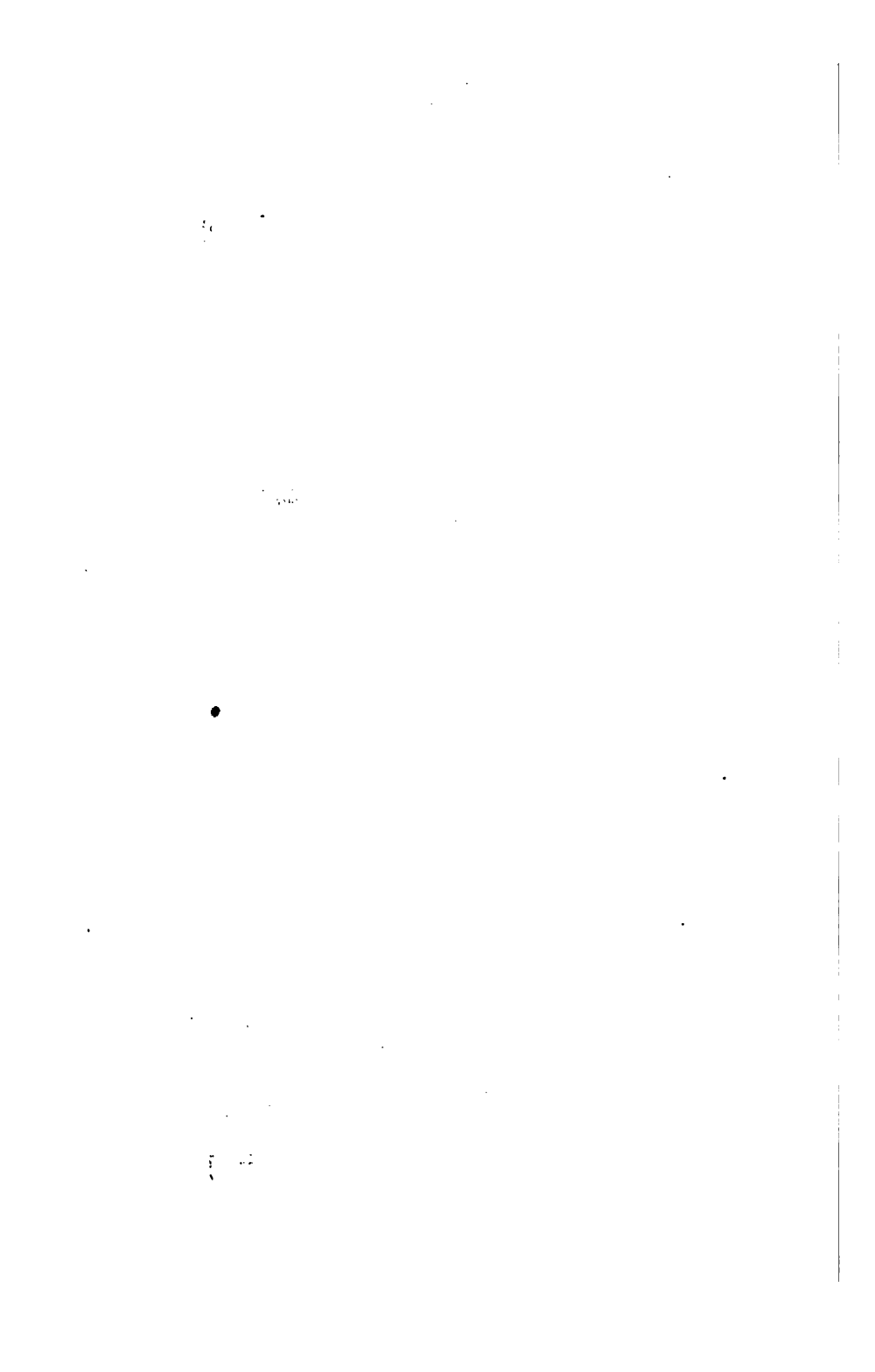
THE END.



TWITTERS.

A STORY OF EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY.

"I behold a foolish young man."



TWITTERS.

CHAPTER I.

A DROWSY afternoon in the latter part of August; sun low in the horizon, glaring through a bank of reddish-gray clouds; a river running lazily by cornfields and willow-beds and tall, whispering rushes; a dry, grassy bank, under the spreading boughs of a gnarled old pollard oak; birds twittering among the branches overhead, crickets chirping among the grasses underfoot; a great yellow-bodied bee flying homeward with a drowsy buzzing hum;

and a crumpled mass of blue muslin and yellow curls wedged into a snug hollow beside something picturesque in brown cords and rough velveteen. Two blue eyes looking into two brown ones; two small dimpled hands crushed in a strong man's grasp. Far away, the thatched roofs of a village half hid by trees; farther still, ranges of dim lilac hills, and a misty, gold-coloured sky. There is my picture, a study from the life; and the figures therein real, moving, breathing, sentient objects; not mere masses of cobalt and sepia, with a light wash of ochre here, and a careful stippling of umber there. Nevertheless, if I may be allowed to carry out my simile, neutral tint was for the moment the prevailing colour in the tableau; and the male figure in cords and velveteen was speaking in that low, husky,

passion-broken voice so suggestive of a coming storm.

"I wish it could be, Dear! I wish to heaven it could be! I never loved you so well, my darling pet, as now, when I have to lose you. I can't break my word, so I must go; mustn't I, *Twitters*? But O, my dearest, it nearly breaks my heart to do it; it does indeed. Don't look so wretched, my pet child. It's a million times worse for me than it is for you."

"No, it isn't," said *Twitters*, whose dear little snub nose was very red, and whose big blue eyes became suddenly moist and dazzled at the suggestion. Her voice, too, sounded short, and suggestive of a bad cold it the head: a combination of circumstances which suddenly impelled Mr. Reginald—or more commonly Rex—Wyndham to take blue muslin, golden

curls, and sweet, tearful, little face into his arms, and proceed to dry the wet eyes, and steady the trembling lips in a rough, greedy manner, equally improper and impolite.

"It's only once, and it's the last time too, Twitters darling," he said, in excuse for himself, as the little captive struggled out of his grasp. "There, I won't do it again; and I'm going away at once; so don't be angry. O child, I wish I were not going; or that I had never gone abroad at all; or that any one would shoot me before I get to London. I declare I'd give a guinea to any one who'd put an ounce of lead into me at the present moment."

"And so would I," said Twitters; a mark of sympathy, which had the effect of making Mr. Wyndham give a little jump

and eye his companion more closely, as he asked in a tone of pained surprise,

“Would you, child? Do you hate me so very much, then?”

“I don’t hate you at all,” said poor little Twitters, beginning to snivel like the child she almost was in reality; “but—but I don’t like you to go away, and be so unhappy. And, Oh, why—why did you ever promise to marry her, if you don’t like her? Oh, it used to be so nice here; and—and I thought” (the sweet voice quivering piteously) “we should be so happy always.”

Rex Wyndham looked down on the poor little white flower-face, took the wee hands in his, and said, speaking very solemnly,

“My darling, if I stop here, if I do what I would like best—what I would give my head to do—and that is marry you, I should be a dishonoured man. I should be the first

who has ever disgraced the Wyndham name, and I should never care to read the *Sans tache* on our crest again ; but I don't care even for that—I mean I *won't* care for it—if you bid me stay, and if it will make you happy again. I love you, my innocent love, better than honour or anything else ; and I'd lose everything in life—ay, go through even the disgrace of that most disgraceful scene, a breach-of-promise case, rather than bring one tear into those dear blue eyes. So tell me freely—choose for me, remembering how I love you—shall I go, or may I— shall I stay ? ”

He reached out one hand as he spoke, so as to touch her soft bright hair ; for she was sobbing passionately, with her pretty face buried in the long grass where she had shrunk away from his embrace ; but at that appeal she made a brave effort to check her

tears, and after a brief second looked up and answered,

“No, no, Rex ; you must go—of course you must—and don’t mind so much about me ; for I won’t be very unhappy, if you are not. Only, Rex dear, do try to be happy. She may be nicer than you think, after all ; and you and I can always be brother and sister at least—like we were before, you know,” the girl added, with a wistful upward glance, as if pleading against the dissent of greater worldly wisdom in her lover’s eyes. “You need not forget me, you know. I don’t think I *could* bear that ; but think of me as staying quietly here, taking care of auntie and your grandfather as usual ; and then, perhaps, you will bring your wife here sometimes, when—when all this is forgotten, and we are only friends again. I am so young, and you are not old either ; it must come to

that *some* day ; and so go now, Rex dear. Please go now quickly ; for, though I am crying, it isn't because I am unhappy ; at least if I am, it is my own fault, and not yours at all. Remember that, and good-bye, dear. Good-bye and God bless you ! ”

Rex did not say one word in reply to this speech. Knowing how and why he was parting from this little girl, there was nothing he could say in honesty that would not have damped her innocent previsions, and cast a chill on the courage she was trying so hard to show for his sake. Therefore he answered nothing in words, but for one moment the short dark locks and the yellow curls mingled in one bright mass. For one moment the strong young man held the tiny maiden in his powerful arms ; and then, with a hoarsely whispered, “ Good-bye and God bless *you*, my darling ! Forgive

me when I'm gone," Rex Wyndham unclasped his hold, and turned resolutely away, leapt up the grassy bank, and set off at a brisk pace towards the railway station across the meadows. He never looked back once — perhaps he did not dare ; and *Twitter*s lay among the sedges and the scented grass, and cried as if her heart would break.

Rex Wyndham was the only grandson of Sir Wyndham Wyndham of Gorseleigh, in Devonshire. His father had died—killed by a fall when hunting—while the boy was still a mere baby. The villagers will show you the place now—a tall ragged hedge, with a drop of a good three feet on the further side of a narrow stony lane—where the young squire went over and broke his own neck, and his gallant gray's as well. "Mistook the place, sir, for one

a few yards lower down, an' killed 'isself on the spot. Why, the flints all about was spattered with 'is blood, pore young gent! and look at yon stain on the milestone there. Ef you'll believe me, that's some on it still." Which I did not believe, however, and do not now, being under the impression that any blood that had been there would have been washed off by rain or other causes long since. Anyhow, the young squire was buried, and his widow and her child had lived on at the Hall until the present day. A weak, frail-looking woman, young Mrs. Wyndham, and one who had probably loved her handsome dashing husband too well to care for marrying again; but had she ever contemplated such a step at any time, it is not at all likely she would have been permitted to carry it into execution; her father-in-law

having a decided objection to second marriages, and being of a dogmatic, capricious temper, with a capacity for domestic tyranny before which the Grand Turk might easily assume the character of a submissive and henpecked underling.

By some mischance the Gorseleigh estate had never been entailed ; and during Reginald's boyhood Sir Wyndham Wyndham had threatened—not once, but fifty times at least—to cut the lad off with a shilling, and send him adrift to shift for himself.

“ I can leave my money to the county hospital if I choose ; and by George, ma'am, I will too ! ” he would thunder out at his pale subdued little daughter-in-law. “ Let me hear of your son ringing the church-bells at night again, or playing ghost to frighten respectable young women, and he

goes, ma'am—goes like a shot—no fear!" A threat which was no idle one, by-the-way; the baronet having already on one occasion, and for very slight provocation, turned off the estate a very worthy man whose fathers and forefathers had been tenants of the Wyndhams for more than a century.

Nevertheless, Rex had always been brought up as the heir of Gorseleigh—had been first sent to Eton and then to Cambridge; and was about as capable of earning his own living, except as boatman, whip, or gamekeeper, as the generality of young men educated under a similar *régime*.

And Twitters? Who was she? No one of any great consequence: of the very smallest consequence indeed possible, being the daughter of a former curate of Gorseleigh, a good and worthy man, who first taught little Rex to decline Latin nouns and

work out the rule-of-three, and who was one of the few people in the world whom Sir Wyndham Wyndham held in thorough respect. His wife, a dear and valued friend of Mrs. Wyndham's, had died in childbirth ; and the little girl, whose mournful entry into the world had made her an additional object of interest and kindness, soon became a great favourite with the tender-hearted widow, and Rex's faithful companion, play-mate, and slave.

Even the squire took to her ; not that he was fond of children in general, but that, happening one day to come across her in the park, where she and her nurse were picking flowers, the little thing ran up to him with a tall spray of foxglove, thrusting it into his hands with the words,

“ Will 'oo have a f'ower, man, to make 'oo pitty ? ”

Sir Wyndham Wyndham stared, burst out laughing, and then exclaimed,

“Why, this is Travers’s baby! And what’s your name, eh, young woman? Polly or Jemima?” Upon which, the little lady, whose nurse happened to rejoice in the second appellation, drew herself up with three-year-old dignity, and announced herself as “Mith Twitters”—a corruption of “Travers,” which became her nickname at the Hall from that day forth. As for Rex, he protected and bullied his little playmate much as the baronet did Mrs. Wyndham. He tied her to a tree, and then forgot her, and left her there for hours. He harnessed her to a little cart, and whipped her when she didn’t go fast enough. He took away her toys, and broke them to find out how they were made. He melted her best wax-doll in the nursery grate. And in

return Twitters adored him, and trotted after him like his shadow wherever he went, rejoicing even then in the title of his "little wife." She was only eight years old when her father died, stricken down suddenly by fever while attending a sick family among his poor parishioners; and the sole thought which seemed to trouble or disturb the dying clergyman was what would become of her, and who would take care of her after he was gone.

"My poor little child, my little Amy! If I could but take her with me to her mother!" was the suffering father's constant moan; and gentle Mrs. Wyndham, coming in to see what she could do for him, heard the piteous words, and answered, in her kind womanly way:

"Don't fret about Amy, Mr. Travers, if she has nowhere better to go, she shall

come to me and be my daughter. I have always wished I had one, and I love the child. Besides, Rex would break his heart if he did not find her here when he comes back from school."

The poor curate's anxious brow lightened, and tears of gratitude rose to the dim hollowing eyes.

"But—Sir Wyndham——" he faltered tremulously; and Mrs. Wyndham laid her hand on his and answered:

"Sir Wyndham will not object. He is very kind-hearted, and he always liked her. She amuses him. I do not ask him for many things, and I am sure he will not grudge me this."

She was right. When all was over, indeed, and the remains of poor Mr. Travers had been committed to the quiet village churchyard, Mrs. Wyndham was startled

out of a silent meditation, as to how best to propound her request to the squire, by receiving a peremptory order from that gentleman to go down to the late curate's cottage and see about that child. "If she has nowhere else to go, bring her up here for a while," he said gruffly. "I don't believe Travers had a relation in the world, and it would be a pity for that saucy little brat to go to the workhouse. There's a lot of room for her in the old house, so long as she doesn't get in my way. You must see to that." A command which his daughter-in-law obeyed with cheerful gratitude, never even hinting that she had already anticipated by promise his kind intentions. So when Rex came home for the holidays he found *Twitters* regularly domesticated at the Hall as one of the family; and thus time rolled on with the

boy and girl, he patronising, teasing, and ordering her about as formerly, but always good-natured to her, and fond of her as a younger sister; she doing his exercises for him, mending his gloves, taking care of his pets, and ever loving and admiring him with her whole heart, until, when Rex was eighteen and his companion four years younger, he went to college, and so broke with boyhood and childish fun and romp for ever. He had "grown up into a man," Twitters said, and she was only a little schoolgirl. Of course, he did not care to talk to her and amuse her in the vacations as formerly; and when at two-and-twenty he left Cambridge for good, and returned home, finding Twitters grown up into a very pretty girl, quiet and much too demure and womanly to be kissed and bullied as of yore, he had no time to learn

anything of her in this new phase, for the shooting season was just commencing, and after barely a fortnight at home he went off to Scotland, on a visit to some friends in the north. Then, after that, he returned to London with one of these friends, and from there wrote urgent letters to his grandfather, begging to be allowed to go abroad and travel a little, so as to "rub up modern languages" and see something of life before he settled down. Sir Wyndham Wyndham didn't much like it—didn't see the use of modern languages. "Fellow wasn't going to be a courier or a hairdresser; and surely English, with just enough Latin and Greek to be able to skim an ode from Horace or quote a verse of Homer to your sons, ought to be enough for an English gentleman. It was just idleness, and tomfoolery, and confounded

good-for-nothingness, that was all ; and if Master Rex thought he would come back one of those Frenchified fools who part their hair down the middle, and can't speak their mother tongue without a lisp, he might, but he would not find a welcome at Gorseleigh, that was all. No, by George, no fear !" After all which he gave in, filled the young man up a cheque for a liberal sum, and suffered him to go where he would. And so Rex went and wandered about very pleasantly, "seeing life" in various ways ; and at Baden Baden he fell in with a certain Captain Scott and his sister, both of whom had seen a great deal more of life in every way than young Mr. Wyndham, and who happened, to his extreme ill luck, to be staying at the same hotel as himself.

CHAPTER II.

MISS SCOTT and her brother looked on Reginald's acquaintance as anything but unlucky ; rather as a fortunate chance, indeed, and one by no means to be thrown away. This couple, not to waste too many words upon them—belonged to a class only too common in those continental towns where gambling is the profession *par excellence*, and baccarat and roulette form the aim and end of life. In more than one of these places they were tolerably well known already ; but unfortunately Rex Wyndham had not seen enough of life to find out this for himself ; and long before

he had discovered that the tall, glorious beauty, who looked barely three-and-twenty by gaslight, was in reality fully ten years older; that her manners, which he thought simply foreign and unconventional, were loud and vulgar, her language fast, her reputation more than doubtful, and her brother a "leg" of the most dangerous class — Adelaide's magnificent eyes and shoulders, combined with a power of fascination which had more than once proved overwhelming to far older men, had been successful in entangling Sir Wyndham Wyndham's young heir into the meshes of a formal engagement. God knows, indeed, if he might not have been worked up into marrying her then and there — I fully believe Miss Scott intended it—but the news of his mother's illness, conveyed in a letter from Twitters, summoned him

suddenly to England; and he departed, promising his betrothed wife to announce his engagement at home, and to return to her as soon as he possibly could, even while down in the depths of his heart he was beginning already to acknowledge the humiliating truth, "I have made a fool of myself." Poor lad! he was not the first who has done so, nor will he be the last. "*Il y a toujours des femmes et des femmes!*"

Home Rex returned accordingly, and, unhappily for all parties, at home he found Amy Travers grown sweeter and prettier a hundred-fold than when he left England six months before, "standing where the waters meet, womanhood and girlhood sweet," and the pride and delight of every one about her. It was she who nursed his mother; she who waited on the

squire, and walked and rode with him ; she who kept the accounts, wrote letters, read aloud, and made a sunshine in the grim old Hall by the mere fact of her bright presence. She was such a winning, loving little thing too ; a little shy and timid, perhaps, with the son of the house, now that he was grown into a tall, handsome man, with broad shoulders and bronzed moustaches ; but this change from the saucy familiarity of other days was rather flattering than otherwise to Mr. Rex, and caused him to give more attention to his mother's young ward than he might otherwise have done. It is a dangerous thing when a man begins to study a girl whom he has known all his life ; doubly dangerous when the girl is not only lovely, but lovable and loving into the bargain ; for Rex soon found

that, once he had conquered this new maidenly reserve, there, close beneath, lay the old, warm, worshipping affection, guarded loyally in her fresh, innocent heart, and ready to put forth new leaves, and spring into bud and blossom at his awakening touch—how readily, indeed, he himself had no idea; but then he did not know what Mrs. Wyndham had been doing for him in his absence! Long ago—before *Twitters* was in her French grammar indeed—the title of “little wife” had been dropped for her as regarded Rex; but the idea sown by it had never quite faded out of Mrs. Wyndham’s mind; and as the girl she had adopted grew, day by day and month by month, closer to her heart, it increased and strengthened, till once, during her tedious illness, she could keep it to herself no longer, and whispered

softly to the patient little nurse at her side :

“Even if I die, Twitters, dear, you will always have a home here ; and perhaps, some day, you and Rex may share it together. He will never love anybody so well as you, I am sure ; and my only prayer is that I may live to see you his wife, as you are already my daughter. I hope I may. I hope it will soon come to pass. I should like him to settle down with us so dearly ;” and then, like all injudicious, middle-aged gentlewomen, the invalid began to build pretty little castles in the air for Rex and Twitters to reign over, until the young girl learnt to think of her former playmate in quite a new light, and to dream of his return and blush at the sound of his name. All very foolish, you’ll say, and all Mrs. Wyndham’s fault,

.

and very wrong and indiscreet of her ; but, then, what did *she* know of Adelaide Scott ?

Well, as I have said before, Rex came home ; and while studying Twitters in the new sweetness of her growing womanhood, wandering about the park with her, reading to her, or cantering over the breezy Downshire uplands at her side, never thought of falling in love with her, nor even dreamt of the danger of the thing. He only felt dreamily that he was happier than he had ever been before, and so let himself drift on in the sweet sunshiny present, almost forgetful at times of the engagement that bound him to Miss Scott, and the ring he had placed on her finger, until the arrival one morning of a letter in his *fiancée's* handwriting, and bearing the London postmark, recalled him, with a quick pang of

something like repulsion, to the recollection of his chains.

Adelaide informed him that she and her brother had returned to England, and were domiciled at No. 19, Alexandra Terrace, St. John's Wood, where she trusted he would run up to see them as soon as might be. Also she intimated prettily that it was her love for him which had prevented her remaining in Germany, reproached him with not writing oftener, and wound up by subscribing herself, "Your own, for ever and ever, Adelaide."

"*My* own, for ever and ever," repeated Mr. Wyndham, as he finished the epistle, and then he groaned; he did not exactly know why, except that he had been a fool.

"I never really loved her a bit. It was all just glamour and passion. I don't

know anything about her, and I wish her brother were at the devil," muttered the young man. "What should I marry now for? I don't want to marry at all; and what on earth will the squire say? Shouldn't wonder if he cut me off with a shilling, as he's so fond of threatening; and yet I can't do anything else. I *can't* back out and say I've changed my mind; it wouldn't be honourable; and, besides, I might have a breach-of-promise case, and all my hanged spooney letters shown up in court; probably a row with Scott, and a regular *exposé* of those cursed debts; after which I should never be able to show my face in Gorseleigh again, or, for that matter, anywhere else where people knew of it. *What* a fool I've been! And I've no reason for breaking my word. Suppose I keep it. I wonder what my mother and

little Twitters will say ! I don't think they would be as down on me as the governor. Hang it all, I'll go and tell the mother now ! If Adelaide is to be her daughter-in-law, she'll have to know it sooner or later."

Acting on which really sensible idea, the young man betook himself to the morning-room, where Mrs. Wyndham lay on her sofa, with Twitters (whom for the moment he had forgotten) reading aloud to her.

"Not gone out, Rex !" exclaimed the little lady, lifting her blue eyes wonderingly at his entrance. "What a miracle on such a fine day ! You don't mean to say you have killed *all* the partridges, poor things ! Or are you going to be good and sociable, and read aloud to us while we work ?"

“That would be very nice,” put in Mrs. Wyndham. “We don’t often see you of a morning, Rex. Come and sit in this arm-chair, dear ; and, *Twitters*, give him the book. Your voice is getting tired, child.”

Rex looked at *Twitters*, and thought how pretty she was, and how well her shining yellow hair contrasted with the deep crimson of the chair and the crisp folds of her white muslin, even as the soft green light stealing through the closed *venetians* seemed to harmonise with the perfect innocence and purity of her fair young face ; and then another style of beauty rose before him, much finer, more dazzling and showy, and he sighed as he said, in a tone very unlike his usual gaiety :

“I’ll take the arm-chair, if you like,

mother ; but I won't read — not this morning."

"Selfish boy !" cried Twitters, laughing, but quite ready to go on herself, if Rex had not checked her.

"No, Twitters, nor you either. I'm not selfish ; for I'll send you away to rest your voice, anyhow. I—I want to talk secrets to my mother."

At which plain speech Twitters flitted out of the room instantly, as swiftly as a little soft white dove ; a sudden warm glow rising to the very roots of her sunny hair, and making her small fingers tingle with a strange, wondering thrill.

"How pretty she is !" said Rex, as the door closed on her.

"And so sweet-tempered and good," replied his mother, warmly. "Next to you, dear, I really think I love her better than

anyone in the world, almost as much as if she were my daughter in reality. Rex, dear," as his face grew graver, and he did not speak, "have I guessed right? Is your secret about *her*?"

"About Twitters, mother! No; why so?" and a deep flush came into Rex's brown cheek, a flush arising, not from pleasure, but from a pang of real downright pain. Ah, how much better if it had been! There would have been nothing of which to feel ashamed in loving little Twitters. Mrs. Wyndham sighed deeply. His answer was evidently a cause of pain to her too, but she only bade him go on; and so urged, Rex told his story; not exactly confessing that he had already repented of his folly, rather indeed heightening Adelaide's charms and general good qualities than otherwise; but certainly speaking in anything but the

tone of a proud or happy lover : while his mother listened with a pale anxious face, the reverse of cheering, and long before he had done the tears sprang to her eyes and trickled down her thin cheeks.

“Oh, Rex, my dear boy, forgive me,” she faltered, trying with habitual meekness to dry them away again. “But I never dreamt of this. I had so hoped——”

“Hoped what, mother?”

“And now I fear I have only done mischief ; but, oh, I felt certain you loved her ; and I am sure, quite sure, that she will never care for anyone else. Oh, dear ; oh, dear, it is all my fault !”

“Loved *who*, mother ? What is your fault ? What do you mean ?” And Rex sprang up and stood over his mother, looking red and angry, and feeling that new pain keener and more sharp, yet

mingled with a strange sort of happiness, too.

“Why *Twitters*, of course,” sobbed Mrs. Wyndham, making matters worse, as foolish women will. “You always seemed so fond of her, and glad to be with her ; and I did so wish it to be. I don’t believe that even your grandfather would object, for he is very fond of her (who could help being so ?), and if he knew that she loved you——”

“Loved *me* ?—little *Twitters* !” repeated Rex slowly ; and then, for a moment, one moment, the pain vanished in a bright glow of happiness, the happiness that might have been, the joy unutterable which had sprung up under his feet, and he had turned away from it—the Eden which had opened for him, and which he had voluntarily renounced, and could never enter now

while life should last. Twitters loved him ! and he——? He knew now what had made those rambles by lake and woods so unspeakably precious ; why the simple ballads she loved to sing rang in his head for days afterwards ; why the simple fact of her presence made him glad, and her departure left a gloom and darkness behind, as though the sunshine had faded from the earth. He knew it all now, her love and his—*his* worthless in the giving, dishonoured by the very date of its existence!

“Fool, fool that I was not to know my own heart better!” he muttered angrily. But that was not all, nor even the worst of it ; for if Twitters loved him—if it could be true—then he had not only ruined his own peace of mind, but hers. He had not only injured himself, but the

little orphan girl, his mother's ward, whom every claim of duty, honour, and chivalry bound him to shield and protect from all trouble and evil. He must go to her, must ascertain if it were so; and then—and then——?

Poor Rex! Dishonour every way. Dishonour, shame, and scandal if he followed where his heart led; dishonour, remorse, and regret if he kept his word. Wrong to one woman or the other in either case. What could he do?

“I am so sorry, Rex, so sorry,” his mother kept saying. “Forgive me, but indeed I never guessed anything of this.” And then Reginald stooped and kissed her.

“Forgive *you*, little mother!” he said, trying to speak gently. “What right have I to be angry with you? I only wish you

could teach me to forgive myself, or that it were possible for you to be mistaken in what you say."

"You cannot break your word without any cause," the mother faltered, trying to catch at his meaning. "A Wyndham could not do that; but, oh, Rex, do you love her, this Miss Scott? Will she make you happy, and will your grandfather like it? Do tell me."

Rex stood upright and clenched his hands bitterly.

"Too late to ask that last. I should have spoken to him before I pledged myself, I suppose. As to happiness, so far as I am concerned, that is of little moment. It is Twit—Amy Travers I am thinking of. Is there no chance that you may be mistaken about—about her feelings? Of course I know that she likes me as a brother. She

is fond of me for your sake ; but—look here, mother, I'll go and speak to her."

"My dear Rex!"

"My dear mother, do you suppose I mean to *ask* her the question? A word, a look, will tell me the truth now; and if you should be wrong, set my mind at rest. I can bear anything myself so long as she is happy, dear little innocent thing! Why, in that case, I would marry Adelaide gladly to-morrow, but——"

"But what? Oh my dear boy, don't!"

"Hush, mother! If you should be right, and I, by my own imprudence and thoughtlessness, have made her care for me, then the least I can do is to let her know that—that she has not—that, in fact, I love her a thousand times more than she can do me, however blackguard and wrong such love may be in me. Don't look so frightened,

mother ; don't you see that it would be a cowardly falsehood to leave her deceived on that point ; that if you and I have misled her previously, we—I at any rate owe it to her to make that poor amends to her womanly pride and delicacy. Trust me, I—I know my duty, hard as it is ; but this I must find out before I go to do it."

"If you would only let me talk to her when you are gone," pleaded Mrs. Wyndham ; but Rex would not even listen to the proposition. He was of opinion, naturally enough, perhaps, that his lady-mother had done too much "talking" to Twitters as it was. He did not tell her so ; filial respect acted as a curb on his tongue, even if he had not been too kind-hearted to hurt by so much as a word the weak, gentle woman to whom he owed his birth ; and before any more could be said he had left the room,

and was looking for *Twitters* on the terrace and in the drawing-room. She was not in either place. She had gone for a walk "through the park, river-ways," the grey-headed old butler told him; and thither *Rex* followed, uncertain even of what he was going to say. Poor little *Twitters* was sitting by the river, dreaming of happy days to come, when she suddenly saw all her life grow cold and dark before her; and looking into her lover's pale face—so gay usually, so worn and haggard now—burst into tears, half of fright, half compassion; and so, being unnerved by sympathy, let him easily draw forth her little secret (secret, alas! no longer, for had not Mrs. Wyndham betrayed it?), and afterwards felt so sorry for him and his trouble that she hardly thought of her own, until he was gone, and she was left lying alone among

the rushes, with the river babbling merrily at her feet, and the sun shining brightly on her yellow hair.

Alone ! How terrible it seemed when she was able to think of it ! With all her full sunny life turned into a blank chaos, stretching before and around her like some wide arid desert, and only relieved by one green spot—*Rex loved her!* After all, while that lasted, she could not be so very, very unhappy ; and he had promised to write to her from London ; so she would have the unspeakable delight of receiving one more letter at least from him ; in return for which she had taken on herself the task of telling Sir Wyndham Wyndham of his grandson's engagement, and of palliating the enormity of his daring to arrange such an important matter without having first asked and obtained a consent

from the head of the family. A ticklish piece of work this, and one from which *Twitters* shrank with well-founded dread; but she knew no one could do it as well as herself; and then, when that was done, there was poor Mrs. Wyndham to nurse and console, and the memory of those past six weeks of unclouded happiness to look back upon, when home and village duties grew unbearably tedious. She could not sit still and cry all day, poor child; and it was just as well that she could not; for idleness is the best nurse, as work is the best cure, ever yet found for grief; and so of the two young lovers thus sadly parted, *Twitters* at the Hall, copying a dry business letter for Sir Wyndham Wyndham, with her heart full of Rex's last passionate appeal, and her lips still burning from the kisses he had pressed upon their dewy

freshness, was infinitely less miserable than Rex, leaning back with closed eyes in a first-class carriage, and for the moment, at any rate, given up to as absolute wretchedness as a man could well endure.

CHAPTER III.

“LET Rex marry the woman, then—confound them both!—and I will allow him three hundred a year as long as he lives respectably and keeps up the honour of his family.”

Such was Sir Wyndham Wyndham's final dictum, and the most gracious speech that could be wrung from him by Twitters' kisses or Mrs. Wyndham's tears. It had been finally proved by that time that the Scotts were resolved not to let Rex slip through their fingers without an *esclandre* equally painful and damaging; and careful investigation into the antecedents of the

brother and sister had failed in discovering anything which could legally or rightfully be brought forward as a bar to the union. They were descended from a family as old, and originally as respectable, as the Wyndhams; and if their father had been a dissipated, good-for-nothing *roué*, and their mother a clever Irish governess, that was not Miss Scott's fault. Neither could the lady help her brother being exceptionally fortunate at cards. How many gentlemen of stainless honour are there not who pride themselves openly on their skill and success at the whist-table, and whose antagonists would resent as indig- nantly as themselves the mere suspicion of there being anything unfair in their triumphs? True, there had been an ill-natured rumour to that effect with regard to Captain Scott; a rumour which had

induced his brother officers to petition him to exchange out of the regiment to which he belonged ; but the truth of it had never been proved. He himself had furiously denied it, and challenged the person who first set it afloat (N.B. The duel never came off, Lieutenant E. declining to meet Captain Scott in the field) ; and though he did certainly succumb to the accusation so far as to leave the army altogether, that step was but the natural outcome of a wounded sensibility too tender to bear such a slight on the sensitive shield of his honour. Again, with regard to their choice of residence, Baden Baden and Homburg are very healthy, charming towns, and a great many exceedingly worthy and domestic people live in them. Who was to say the Scotts were not among the number ? While as to the notoriously

constant succession of Adelaide's admirers, the more beautiful a woman is the more difficult it is to keep men from running after her ; and the very fact of their having retired one by one was but a proof to the liberal-minded of the virginal severity of the lady's heart. As for *their* account of the matter, or the evil whispers of less attractive women, neither ought to be taken into consideration for a moment ; disappointed wooers being as proverbially prejudiced and one-sided as disappointed women are spiteful. Let them prate as they would about fast doings, midnight rambles under the moon, late supper-parties, with cigarettes for the ladies, &c. —what did it all amount to, even if there were some truth in it ? Nowadays everybody is either a little fast in reality, or affects to be so—everybody, that is, who

wants to be anybody at all; and if all that the "World" and the "Saturday" say be true, Adelaide Scott was no different from the generality of women in the nineteenth century, women of the upper classes pre-eminently. No, there was no escape for Rex short of jilting his fair betrothed; and that was a step of which he never seriously thought for a moment.

"I have been a fool," was the sole comment he made, even to himself; and then he resigned himself to his fate, for not one of the investigations or enquiries into the character of the Scotts came from him. I doubt whether he even heard of them. They were the doings of the baronet and Mrs. Wyndham; and Rex would not so much as listen to a whisper on the subject, far less to condolence.

“Fact is, he’s been a great jackass,” growled the old squire, “letting himself be hooked by a brute of a woman older than himself. Strong language, Miss Twitters! And what if it be strong language? I suppose I may use what language I please in my own house. Idiotic fool, to go and fall in love with a middle-aged woman before he is out of pinafores! If I wiped him out of my will for it, and told him to go to the workhouse with her, as I’ve a jolly good mind to do this very day—Mary, I’ll be shot if you’re not worse than a wet blanket in November, sitting blubbering away there for nothing! Yes, Miss Impertinence, for nothing; and I should like to know what you put in your oar for when I am speaking to my daughter-in-law. I suppose *you’ll* be running off with this precious Captain

Scott one of these fine days, and expecting me to give you a wedding-breakfast and a dowry, since you stand up so hotly for Master Rex? But you'd better not look for any such thing. As you make your bed you'll have to lie on it, and deuce a bit of help you'll get from me, no fear! And as to Rex, he says this woman is handsome and sensible, comes of a decent family, and has some money of her own; so I've agreed to give him three hundred a year; and if she really cares for him, she'll marry him on it. If she don't she'll set him free, and a deuced good thing for him too. Feelings! Bah! Boys never have any: never know their own minds for a week together; though why *you* should get as red as a turkey-cock for that, child, I'm sure I don't know. If Miss Scott throws my precious grandson over to-morrow, he'll

have forgotten her in a fortnight, and, perhaps, be head over ears in love with some one else, just like his father. Now, Mary, what's the good of making a fool of *yourself*? Do you suppose poor Hal never looked at a woman before he saw you, you goose? A fine thing if a father mayn't speak of his own son, indeed! But there never was a man so nagged at and worried and snivelled over as I am; and I'll be hanged if I don't make a stand against it one of these days! You see if I don't, that's all, no fear!" And, having finished with his favourite expletive, and sufficiently bullied the two women, who had never done anything to offend him, for the misdeeds of their absent idol, Sir Wyndham Wyndham pulled his chair nearer to the fire, told his daughter-in-law to do the same and look

cheerful, and desired *Twitters* to sing to them.

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It was evening in London on the same day—a close, sultry, oppressive evening, with dark woolly clouds gathering one above the other overhead, and distant rumblings beginning in the copper-coloured horizon, and gradually drawing nearer and nearer, as *Rex Wyndham* entered the showy drawing-room of a stylish-looking house in *St. John's Wood*.

A pale sickly twilight still lingered in the threatening sky, lighting the upper surfaces of the leaves in the *Regent's Park*; and the windows of the house in question were thrown wide open to catch such faint puffs of air as might still be lingering in the close dusty street or stirring the thirsty-looking petals of the

geraniums and calceolarias in the balcony; but within, the gas had already been lit, and under the full glare of the large glass-dropped chandelier sat Adelaide Scott, half-reclining in a comfortable *causeuse*, the saffron-velvet cushions of which set off the rich folds of her black-satin robe, the magnificent bust and arms, white and firm as if carven out of marble, the large lustrous eyes, and masses of blue-black hair, which she wore curling thickly over her low forehead and twisted into a wavy coil behind.

Her complexion was so very brilliant, taken in conjunction with such eyes and hair, that a cynical observer might have attributed its pure pearl and carmine to another source than nature. But, be this as it might, she was a wonderfully handsome woman; and so the military-looking

gentleman leaning over her chair and whispering in her ear seemed to think, for he never took his eyes off the charms so lavishly displayed except to raise them with a sudden scowl at Rex's entrance. There were two other men in the room, one lounging in rather a free-and-easy manner at the window smoking a cigarette, the other sitting before a tiny inlaid table conning the evening paper, with an unlit cigar between his lips. Both of these, however, moved as the door opened, and greeted Rex's entrance with a cheerful "How do, Wyndham?" Captain Scott, the last described, adding :

"I began to wonder what had become of you. Are we going to have a storm? The sky looks anything but lively."

"Yes, I think we shall have rain before long," said Rex, carelessly; and then he

came across the room and shook hands with Adelaide, whose brilliant eyes were fixed with more of enquiry than tenderness on his face. It wore a decidedly grave expression at the moment.

“*Fainéant !*” said she, shaking a pretty forefinger at him. “Where have you been these two days, not to come near us? Do you know Mr. Hawkshaw, by-the-way? Mr. Wyndham, Mr. Hawkshaw. And now sit down, and tell us the news.”

“What news?” asked Rex, after a cold bow had passed between him and the other man, who evidently resented his appearance. “Public or private?”

“Not public, certainly, if you mean the war; for I am heartily sick of it. One hears nothing but war, war, war, all day and every day; and I don’t care a—*a hang* for home politics (Mr. Hawkshaw,

are you *very* much shocked at my little bit of slang? It is Bertie's fault; he teaches it me), though, by-the-way, Rex, that reminds me I was going to ask you who represents your borough?"

"What borough? Daneminster?"

"Yes; your grandfather doesn't, does he?"

"No, he never cared for politics. Mr. Nesbit of Thurston Hall—Nesbit, the soap-and-candle people, you know—is the member at present; but he's not popular, even with the Liberal party, and there's a talk of his seat being contested at the next election."

"Then why don't you stand for it, Rex? It is your proper place to do so; and, of course, you would have your grandfather's interest, and all that. I'm sure it would be awfully jolly to see you

at the hustings, making a speech and getting pelted with rotten eggs."

"Thanks. I'm afraid, however, you never will see me in that position; so you must make up your mind to enjoy it in imagination only."

"But why, Rex?" Miss Scott persisted, in a tone of greater earnestness than she had used before. "I should *like* to see you in Parliament; and—and when you come into your property you will want something to do during the season, when we are up in town, you know, and there is no shooting or hunting."

"You forget that the property is not mine, Adelaide, and very likely will never come to me at all. Besides, even if I desired a seat in the House, which I don't, my political principles are much too opposed to my grandfather's for him to

support me; and I am far too poor to stand a contest at the election without him."

"Principles!" she repeated vaguely; "but surely no one thinks about *them* in politics." Then, losing sight of that part of his answer for another more important: "But what do you mean by the property not coming to you? Why should you suppose such a thing? Have you—Rex, I am sure of it by your face—you have heard from Sir Wyndham Wyndham since I saw you! Am I not right?"

"Yes, I had a letter this morning; not from him exactly, but my mother, and written at his direction."

"And—and what did he say?"

If a face could show changes of colour under a stratum of rouge and chalk, Miss Scott might have been seen to pale as she

spoke. Her lips *did* tremble; and Mr. Hawkshaw, who had retired in disgust to the other side of the room when he found himself neglected for the new-comer, wondered, with jealous curiosity, what Rex could have been saying to awaken such evident interest and excitement in his fair hostess.

“Nothing about the property at all,” Rex answered, dropping his voice so that only Adelaide should hear him, though in other respects his manner was as indifferent and unloverlike as possible. “It refers to my own affairs—our affairs, I ought to say; and I came to tell you about it. He says he will settle three hundred a year on me on certain conditions; and offers me his interest besides to get me a berth in the Home Office, with a commencing salary of half as much again. So that fixes me in

London, as of course I shall accept. I should be a fool to do otherwise. As to the property, it is not entailed as you know, and he may leave it to any one he pleases. There are two Wyndhams in India, second cousins of mine, and one of them used to be rather a favourite with my grandfather when he was a lad. He's coming home on furlough this winter; and my mother mentions in her letter that the governor has asked him to spend his Christmas with them."

"Asked *him* to Gorseleigh while he sends you away!" said Miss Scott, with a sudden contraction of her black and level eyebrows. "H'm-m!"

"As to sending me away, I confess I don't see it," Reginald answered proudly. "It is very kind of him to get me this berth; and, of course, I should have left

Gorseleigh in any case before my marriage.
Cela va sans dire."

"I don't see that at all," said Adelaide.
"Your grandfather has six thousand a year, hasn't he? and in a great house like Gorseleigh there must be room for a dozen couples. Besides, one would think your mother would be glad of the companionship of her son and his wife; though, by-the-way, she has a companion—some girl living with her, has she not?"

The question was put carelessly; but the sudden flush and frown which gathered over Rex's sunburnt face did not escape his *fiancée's* notice. He answered, grimly enough:

"Miss Travers, the orphan child of our late curate, lives at the Hall as one of the family. My grandfather adopted her when her father died; and to my mother she is.

exactly the same as though she were her own child."

"Perhaps the squire will marry her to this cousin of yours, and leave *them* the property," suggested Adelaide meditatively. "Is that what you were thinking of, Rex? It would be a disagreeable look-out certainly."

Perhaps Rex agreed with her in the last observation; for the frown on his brow deepened, and he answered hastily:

"That will never be—at least, I mean it is not in the least probable."

"You don't think the old gentleman would like it?" said Adelaide calmly. "But of course it would be a great chance for a girl in her position; and I don't doubt she will make a dead set at him. Why, my dear Rex, what *have* I said? You look as black as thunder. Has she been making

a dead set at you? Ah, now come and confess!"

Rex Wyndham coloured angrily.

"You are perfectly wrong, Adelaide. Miss Travers is a young lady of far too much modesty and purity to even——But why on earth should her name be dragged into the matter at all?"

"Why on earth shouldn't it, unless it be too precious? I declare I begin to feel quite jealous. What is this *schöne Mädchen* like?"

"Like a quiet little English girl, and nothing in the least in your style. How can you be so absurd, Ada? What is she to you?"

"My dear boy, don't be cross. Miss Tanner, or whatever her name is, is nothing to me except as regards you; that is (don't be conceited, I was only joking

just now) as a possible rival in your grandfather's affections. Is he fond of her?"

"Yes."

"But I thought you were a great favourite. You always gave me to understand so at Baden Baden."

"So I am, when I do everything in exact accordance with his will and pleasure, and don't run against him in any way."

"Well, and have you done the latter now? By-the-way, you never told me how he received the news of—of our engagement. Did he not think me very foolish to bind myself to such a wilful, headstrong, passionate boy?" This was said playfully, and Adelaide's long white fingers were stretched out, and rested with a pretty caressing touch on her lover's arm. "You must know I fully expected a civil

message from him, or at least a letter from your mother. It would have been only friendly."

"You must not be *exigeante*, Adelaide. Recollect they do not know you yet, and naturally the news was a great surprise to them. My grandfather always expects to be consulted on every family arrangement before it is decided."

"And he is very angry that you omitted to do so, and preferred to choose your own wife for yourself. Is that what you mean?"

"He is not pleased, certainly; but you see he has not cut us adrift altogether, as he might have done if he had chosen."

"H'm! You gloss it over, but I am not flattered; and (of course I don't want to blame you, dear) but I can't help thinking that you must have managed

matters down there rather badly. You know you are rather brusque and hasty in your manner sometimes. I wish your grandfather had seen *me*."

"But as that is out of the question——"

"I don't see why it need be. In fact, I think he ought to see his—his future granddaughter," laughing a little affectedly, "before any arrangements are made, which could not be easily altered afterwards. People often take a prejudice against others whom they have never seen; but, frankly, I don't think—do you?—that I am *very* repulsive; and I love you so well, that I should be grieved beyond measure if I were the cause of even a doubt as to your coming into your own property. Do you not think—it seems so awkward for me to have to suggest it—but surely, if you proposed to bring me down on a visit

for a day or two to your mother—it is only natural that she must wish to see me before I become her daughter; and I believe she is too delicate to come up to town, or I am sure I should be most happy——”

“That is *quite* out of the question, at present, at any rate,” Rex interrupted hastily. “I am very sorry, and I hope you don’t think me indifferent about it, Adelaide; but if you knew my grandfather, or understood the frame of mind he is in just now, you would see for yourself that I could not possibly hint at such a thing. I am sure you will find my mother all that is kind and affectionate after our marriage; and as to the property, it is a matter of very little consequence to us. It is not mine. Indeed, it has not even come down in the direct line hitherto; for my great-grandfather

passed over his eldest son for some offence in favour of the second, my grandfather, so I have the less claim to it; and let it come or let it go, I must say I care very little at present. Anyhow, Sir Wyndham is strong and hearty enough to live another twenty years with ease; and in the meanwhile, £450 a year ought to be enough for us to begin upon; so now, Adelaide, do let us put the subject of Gorseleigh aside. I came here this evening to ask you about a matter far more nearly concerning us; and I want you to be amiable and willing to please me about it. I am sure you must know my chief wish is to please you."

Rex had been standing till now; but as he said this he sat down, and drew his chair as near to his betrothed as the voluminous folds of her skirts would permit.

She could not help noticing the sudden paleness which had come over his brown cheek ; but there was a decision in his tone which prevented her interrupting him, and she only looked at him enquiringly.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE told you," Rex began, rather nervously, and speaking with unwonted slowness, "that I only learnt this morning what my income is to be. In fact, if I had not been feeling rather anxious for—for both our sakes about the matter, I should not have stayed away yesterday or the day before. Now that it is settled, however—and on the whole I must own better than I had expected—I want you to do what I have only been waiting for this knowledge to ask you, and fix the day. Let it be soon. We have nothing to wait for, you know, and I should like to write

to my grandfather to-night, and tell him that I gratefully accept his proposals."

Surely never lover yet pressed for the completion of his happiness in tones of greater gravity and constraint; and perhaps Miss Scott felt it so, for she sat pouting her full scarlet lips, and plaiting and unplaiting the softly shining folds of her black dress without even glancing at her lover's face in reply.

"Shall we say this day month?" Rex went on. "That is time enough for a trousseau, isn't it, Ada? and I can take a small house and furnish it; or, if you preferred it, we might go into furnished apartments till you saw something that you liked. I don't know much about house-hunting or furnishing myself; but something must be fixed on, and I think the sooner the better, eh?"

Still Ada said nothing ; but she threw back her head with a sudden movement, which might have been fatigue ; and Captain Scott, who was watching her none the less closely for the animated conversation he was keeping up with his friends, left them, and came across the room to her side.

“How frightfully spoony you two people are !” he said, laughing. “You’ve sat whispering there all the evening. Come, rouse up, and give us a share in your charming society, both of you. Ada, *ma belle*, you look *triste*.”

“Reggie is teasing me to fix the day,” said Adelaide, petulantly. “He wants it to be in a month, impatient fellow !”

“And why not ?” put in Rex. “Look here, Scott, I learnt to-day what my income will be—four hundred and fifty pounds a

year to begin with. Quite enough to keep a wife on ; and so, as I told your sister, where is the use in delay ?”

Adelaide’s eyes met Captain Scott’s in a steady glance.

“Four—hundred—and—fifty,” repeated the latter slowly. “Ha ! The old man is not very liberal to you, seeing that his income is—what was it you told me once—six thousand a year ?”

“And *he* only gives Rex three hundred a year,” muttered Adelaide. “The poor fellow is to be made work for the rest in some horrid government office.”

“I had no claim to expect as much,” observed Reginald in reply ; and as to work, there is nothing I desire more. Surely, Adelaide, you would not like me to pass my life in idleness ?”

“And how did your grandfather take

the news, then?" asked Captain Scott, calmly. "Amiably, I conjecture, as you seem so well satisfied. Well, I am glad; though I suppose the next thing you will want is to carry off Ada to Gorseleigh to introduce her to your family. Hard lines for me as I'm to lose her altogether so soon; but——" Adelaide interrupted him.

"Not at all," she said, with a short, hard laugh; "I am not to be intruded upon that halcyon spot; don't be afraid. A furnished cot in Islington or Clapham is to be the sunniest of our aspirations when we are married. That is the programme Reggie has just been laying down for me; and, after all, what could one want more!"

"Ada, that is unfair," Rex began, but was checked rather imperiously by his brother-in-law to be.

“Come, come,” said the latter hastily; “all this is folly, and we mustn’t neglect our friends any longer for it to-night. To-morrow will do well enough for our own affairs and business details; and if you look in about three o’clock, Rex, we’ll talk them over comfortably. Now, Ada, sing us a song. Hawkshaw has been getting rabid for one this half-hour back. He says he never heard anything like your French student choruses; and, Wyndham, come and have a cigar. You mustn’t look solemn over a young lady’s sauciness, even if she is your sweetheart. I’ll bet anything she’ll make it up to you later.”

Rex said nothing; but he followed the captain with rather a weary step to the round table in the window where a couple of fresh packs of cards and a tray with bottles and glasses had just been placed;

while Adelaide, after a few light words with the other gentlemen, glided to the piano, and soon set the little room and the quiet terrace without ringing with her powerful voice in the gay refrain of a well-known ballad from the quartier Latin :

Toujours ! Toujours !

À Bacchus et les amours.

Toujours, Toujours !

À Bacchus et les amours.

Hioup ! hioup ! hioup ! Tra la la la.

Hioup ! hioup ! hioup ! Tra la la la.

À Bacchus et les amours !

As he went away that night Reginald wondered vaguely within himself whether, in the event of Adelaide ever going down to Gorseleigh, she would choose that song to sing to his grandfather. Unfortunately like a good many gentlemen prone to considerable license of tongue in themselves, Sir Wyndham Wyndham was exceptionally fastidious with regard to

women and their ways. Rex little thought how he himself was being discussed at that moment.

"It's no good talking, Bertie," Miss Scott was saying imperiously, "I showed him what I thought; and I meant to do so. I'm willing to give up a good deal to get out of this hamper of debts and disagreeabilities and endless anxiety; but to live in some stupid, small, poorly furnished house in a cheap part of London and marry a sulky young clerk in a government office! No, thank you, I won't; so there's an end of it. I hope I can do something better for myself than that, and therefore the sooner we go abroad again the better."

"Don't be a fool, Ada," retorted Captain Scott, roughly. "A 'sulky young clerk,' who will be Sir Reginald Wyndham,

with an income of £6,000 a-year in the course of a very short time, is not to be thrown over so lightly, Please to remember that you were thirty-two last Saturday, and that you are already beginning to get a trifle *passée* and *fâde* by the side of fresh young girls. In a year or two more——”

“Thanks, Bertie,” his sister broke in impetuously, “You’re very frank, deliciously so, and I’ve no doubt quite correct in all your calculations; but if you please we’ll leave ‘a year or two more’ to take care of themselves; and as Reggie said to-night his grandfather may last another twenty for ought we know.

“Pshaw! A gouty old man who’s lived well all his life, and has a vile temper! He’ll not last three.”

“I’ll not *wait* three,” cried Adelaide,

vehemently, "and I'll not marry on the chance of a losing game. Besides it's a horribly risky thing. Suppose—I don't like to think of it—but *suppose* that other man were to turn up and——"

"Are you mad, Ada? What is the good of frightening yourself about a fear that is past; dead and buried like the man himself?"

"So you say, and so I think; but after all how can we be certain? Hold your tongue, Bertie, this is my affair. The loss, if loss it is to be, will be my loss; while only the gain——"

"Well the gain will be yours, too."

"Not at all. The gain will be yours and you know it."

"You think nothing, then, of becoming Lady Wyndham, with a large income, a fine estate, and a handsome young

husband, whom you can twist round your finger?"

"That's your opinion, not mine. My vanity has not blinded me quite so far; and let me tell you one thing, the woman who winds Rex Wyndham round her finger will have a precious long and a precious strong finger too. He's tired of *me* already."

"Nonsense! Why, he was urging on the wedding to-night,"

"Yes, with a face like a walking funeral."

"Pooh, pooh, Ada! These are mere fancies. I'm sure at Baden Baden the lad worshipped your very shadow."

"My dear Bertie, that was one time, and this is—another. At present it is his worship which is the shadow. Indeed I shouldn't wonder if he had got *épris* with

some other girl during those six weeks he was over here by himself. He grew as red as fire when I spoke—quite accidentally—of his mother's companion ; so just to draw the goose out I improvised a match between the girl and some cousin of his ; and I declare I thought he would have eaten me by the face he made."

"Then the only proper thing to do is to marry him at once."

"Or not at all ! *Doucement, Bertie, mon frère.* Don't be in a hurry. I daresay you want to be on the safe side, and that you're thinking that in a year or two I mayn't be quite as much use to you pecuniarily as I have been ; all of which is very pretty, and just as generous and grateful as I expected from you ; but, on the other hand, I've got myself to look to, and I don't mean to become Mrs.

Reginald Wyndham unless I'm quite sure it will be for my own advantage so to do both now and afterwards."

"Then, in fact, you mean to take the reins into your own hands," said Captain Scott, rising suddenly, and speaking between his teeth in a manner which made his sister start uneasily.

He was a smallish, gentlemanly-looking, pale-complexioned man, with a somewhat lazily indifferent manner in general; and (in public) one of uniform gallantry and deference to his sister, who, indeed, seemed to rule him in the most queenlike manner; but underneath this exterior there lay a will of iron and the temperament of a despot; and when roused to anger, Adelaide herself knew that no tiger could be more pitiless or ferocious, and cringed and trembled before him accordingly, like any weak

womanly woman, and very unlike the gorgeous Semiramis who had trilled out the students' chorus of "*Bacchus et les Amours*" one brief hour since.

"You mean to take the reins into your own hands, do you?" the captain repeated, raising his voice a semitone at every word. "Do so, then, and go to the devil if you like; for you'll get no help from me unless you do my bidding, and that I tell you fairly. If you think I can't do without you, you're mistaken, and the sooner you learn it the better; for I'll prove it to you in a week, if you like, and could have done so any time these two years. 'Use to me!' Well, I daresay you may have been of *use*; but pray haven't I been the same to you; and could you have lived at fine hotels, worn smart gowns and jewels, and had your fling in every

way, as you have done, for half-a-dozen years back, without me at your side? Now, look here, are you going to be a mad fool or not? For if you are, say so, and go your way while I go mine. Whose interest, do you suppose, I'm thinking of in this matter, if not yours? And don't you think I know better than you what is your interest; or have you forgotten what a bungle you made of young Ledochowski; and how you owned yourself you wished you had let me manage that tight-fisted little French marquis? Fact is, you women can never see an inch beyond the things right in front of your nose; while we look to the right and left of it, and so get a tolerably clear view all round. But as to you, Ada, you're worse than women in general; for you *always* lose your head just in the wrong place, you're so deucedly

short-sighted and hot-tempered ; and that's exactly what you're doing in the present case. Can't you *see* that if old Wyndham meant to disinherit his grandson, he'd have done so now in the first anger of hearing of his engagement, instead of waiting to do it afterwards — a man proverbially touchy and quick-tempered ? And that if he has cooled down already into tacitly sanctioning the marriage by making the lad an allowance, he'll do so still more in a few weeks' time, and probably end by wanting him back at the Hall, and you too, before your honeymoon's over. Why, the game's in your own hands ; and a game worth winning, too, when you think what the stakes are, if it were not too ridiculously easy for a handsome girl like you, with no antagonist but an old man, whom we know from his grand-

son has a decided penchant for pretty women."

"You forget *Mrs.* Wyndham, Bertie," said Adelaide, but rather meekly than argumentatively, and further softened by the compliment in the last sentence.

"No, I don't forget her; though I should hardly think her worth remembering, even as an ally, with the chances you have already: a poor, weak woman, devoted to her son, and probably ready to cut off her head at his bidding. *I* know all about the household, I tell you, and though I don't deny that you've got to be civil to her and prudent generally for a good while to come, till you've got your foot well into the hall in fact, and the baronet under your thumb; once you've done that I expect you may keep the box seat and drive pretty well how and where you

please. Only you *must* mind your pace at first, Ada, and do the gentle, high-bred wife and submissive daughter-in-law pretty strongly. If you don't; or if you give in to any of your old habits or bursts of temper you'll just ruin yourself, and spoil the best chance you'll ever have in all your life to come. You're *not* getting younger, you know, fly out at me as much as ever you like for saying so."

"I'm not going to fly out at you, and you needn't be afraid," said Adelaide, good-humouredly. "It will be rather fun to enslave papa-in-law and oust that 'quiet little English girl, who is not at all in my style' (I owe Master Reggie one for that!) from her post as favourite Number One with the old people. By-the-way, mightn't Sir Wyndham Wyndham be a better catch than

his grandson after all? Bertie, you're awfully clever and far-sighted; but I really think I am cleverer than you sometimes; and I'm not so tyrannical either. You do tyrannise over me fearfully, you know."

"If I do it's for your good; and you can take it out by tyrannising over Wyndham afterwards."

"And you really think then that there is no fear of—of—that our secret will ever come to light?"

"How should it? Have you forgotten that it came to an end five years ago? I tell you I won't have you think of such nonsense. You're quite safe, and have been this ever so long."

"Then give me another glass of that dry champagne, and I'll go to bed, or all this bother and talking will make me as haggard

and yellow as a witch for my lover to-morrow. I say, Bertie, you don't think I was *too* cross? He's sure to come, isn't he?"

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CHAPTER V.

AND meanwhile what was Twitters doing while all these plots and plans, which if carried out were to militate so seriously against her peace of mind, were being woven in London? I have said that of the two young lovers she was happier than Reginald in the first hour of their parting; but, on the other hand, it must be remembered that he, for his part, was escaping from the scene of past happiness and present regrets, hurrying away from temptations and memories, at once dangerous and painful, and rushing into the whirl, turmoil, and bustle of the great

queen of cities, the mighty absorber of a million cares and sorrows, the grandest cure in its very heartlessness and racket for all sentiment and love sickness; and where not only was a beautiful woman—a woman who, he believed, loved him—waiting to receive him with open arms; but where he had all the consolations of clubs, theatres, and billiard-rooms, and the thousand and one distractions so efficacious in curing young men of passing fits of love or melancholy.

Widely different was it with Twitters. When the first excitement of the parting and sacrifice had passed off, when day by day she realised more fully that the whole of her life must now be concentrated in an invalid woman and a testy old man, without any break in the form of pleasant visits from Rex, or any hope of a brighter

day with him ever dawning ; when the conviction came to her that she had *had* her day and it was over ; that there was no more brightness for her except such as she could extract out of life at the Hall without Rex ; that even his love was a thing she must not think of or take pleasure in because it belonged to another woman—then, indeed, life grew very sore and heavy to her, and the young heart felt inclined to say with the Psalmist that its sorrow was more than she could bear.

The fact is, life at the Hall was very dull, and with all her little daily duties Twitters had not enough to do, in default of any better distraction, to keep her heart from feeding on itself, and pining, silently indeed, but very sadly and hopelessly, for the absent one. She loved Rex, and she missed him and wanted him so very badly ; more, of

course, now that she could never have him any more, than she had ever done in the whole course of her life. Then, too, she had to hear him constantly talked about, to discuss his marriage, to listen to all sorts of wonders and surmises respecting his future wife, to comfort his mother, and keep the baronet in a good temper; and to go on doing this day after day, while all the time there was rising up from her poor little bruised heart a passionate cry for comfort and pity in the hard fate which had fallen on her; the fate that had not only parted her from the only man she had ever loved, but forbade her even to think of him except as the lover of another woman.

And she did try not to do so; tried as hard and honestly as a good little girl could, and shut her ears when she heard poor, bleeding, ill-used love crying out.

from her breast : "Have pity on me. Feed me. Nurse me. Take me in your arms. Am I not your first, your only one, and have I not been cruelly enough treated as it is? If fate is so harsh, need you be the same? Will it make *you* happier to drive me from you. Ah! why must you be so stern—you, a young, hardly used girl? Have pity and hide me in your heart. I am wounded, I am suffering. Do not put me away yet awhile, at any rate."

Specious, dangerous pleadings ; but Twitters would not listen to them. She knew well enough that from the moment Rex told her of his engagement to Miss Scott, her love for him, so innocent before, had become a snare, if not a sin ; and so she tried hard to fight against it, as a brave, pure English girl should, and as

many, very many, do fight, let men tempt and belie them as they will, every day of our lives ; but withal the struggle was very great, the pain very bitter, and poor little Twitters pined and faded under it till her blue eyes lost their brightness, and her tiny face its fresh rose colour, and she moved about only the shadow of herself in her lover's grand old home.

The worst of it was that Mrs. Wyndham pined, too, and for much the same cause, only less silently. She *wanted* Rex. These two women loved the young man, who, I fear, was as little worthy of it as most men are of the love of such women, so devotedly that they could not bear him to be out of their sight. True, the mother had been very angry at first, and grievously hurt and disappointed at the break down of her hopes ; but now that her boy was

gone, now that weeks had passed without seeing him, just when she had hoped to have him constantly near her after his long previous absence, she began to yearn sadly for his presence; and, forgetting how her own imprudence had made the girl a victim to the same cravings, used *Twitters* as a safety-valve for all her complaints and laments over her missing darling. The baronet wanted him also; though, too proud to own it, he only showed his sense of loneliness by greater irritability than usual to the other members of the household. But the fact was, he liked to have Rex about the place. It pleased him to see the handsome face and stalwart figure at his side. He was proud of his grandson—proud even of his reckless ways and independent speech; and, besides liking to have him near to lecture and bully, he hated London,

looked on it as a sink of temptation and iniquity, and felt sure that every day spent there would wean the lad more from the ways and manners of his father's home.

So here, you see, were three people all wearying for a young man who, though far away, was on his part longing almost equally to be with them ; and who, to stifle that longing, was hurrying with foolish haste into a loveless and unlovely marriage. Truly, a strange world this, and one in which we all work at cross-purposes with each other.

Rex wrote at intervals to his family, wrote of his arrival in London, of his bachelor apartments, of escorting Miss Scott to various places for seeing and being seen, of his urging her to name the day ; of the day being at last fixed, and suitable rooms (Ada objected to bind-

ing herself to a house) found for the young couple in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park ; all of which information came in brief letters written in a forcedly cheerful strain, and invariably addressed to his mother. He was an honourable man at heart, and he never wrote to *Twitters* now, never once since that first letter he promised her : that single, passionate, farewell letter which she, poor girl, kissed and cried over, and carried in her bosom ; and which now lies, as I verily believe, yellow and worn, laid up in lavender in a certain secret drawer among the few priceless treasures of a loving woman's life.

Now it happened that one day, shortly after the arrival of that letter from *Rex* which told of the apartments near Hyde Park, *Mrs. Wyndham*, then sitting working with *Twitters* in the morning-

room, began to whimper a little and to say as usual:

"I want my son. Why has he gone away! Oh, dear! oh, dear! I have lost him altogether now."

"Don't, dear, don't," said Twitters, in her sweet, coaxing voice. "You will soon see him again. It is only for a little while."

"A little while, when he is going to be married! When he is making a new home for himself so f-far away!" And then there came a little sob, with tears in it, which brought Twitters on to her knees by the sofa in a moment, and two warm, soft young arms round the widow's body.

"Now, Auntie, darling, *don't* be silly. What if he is going to—to be married? All men do the same some time or another, and without loving their little mothers

one bit the less ; and when it is over you will have a daughter as well as a son ; and she will love you, too, first for his sake and then for your own ; so——”

“Horrid woman !” broke in imprudent Mrs. Wyndham. “I can’t bear the thought of her ; and as to her loving me, I am sure I shall never even like *her*. ‘Daughter,’ indeed !”

I’m afraid this was rather pleasant to Twitters for a moment ; but the next she said to herself, “You *spiteful* little thing !” and went on coaxing : “But, Auntie, that is naughty, and you must try to like her. You will, you know, if she is Re—*his* wife, and if she loves him ; and then you will go to see them, and be made much of——”

“No, no,” cried the mother sadly, “I can’t do that. I can’t go away from home.

I never have even for a day since that morning my darling left me, and said as he kissed me before mounting that if I stayed at home for him he would be back early; and he never did come back—alive! Besides, Sir Wyndham would not spare me. You know I can't go to see my poor people without his declaring that he has wanted me. He would miss me, and be more angry than ever with poor Rex. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Then they will come to see you instead," persisted Twitters. "They must come here after the wedding, of course; and then you will have him again and will make her acquaintance as well. Don't you *want* to see her? She must be so very handsome, to judge from her photograph; and you know you like to look at handsome women. Now, don't say 'No,' for you *do*; and so does grandpapa. Indeed, I believe he will get

so proud of his beautiful daughter-in-law that he won't want to let them go away again ; and so you will be happy once more."

"But, my darling," said the mother, cheering a little under the winning voice and smile, and happily unconscious that Twitters in her innocence was drawing out the very same programme as Captain Scott had done before her. "Grandpapa won't hear of their coming here. He gets angry if they are even talked of. He is as displeased at all this as it is possible to be. How can they come ?"

"Oh ! grandpapa can be coaxed. Don't you think he must miss Rex himself?" She was getting braver, and did not bungle at the name this time. "We can easily persuade him into inviting them, if we let him think it is his own idea. It

does not do to urge him too much about a thing, that's all," said Miss Twitters, who, for all her simplicity, had a very tolerable notion of how to manage mankind.

"Do you really think so?" cried Mrs. Wyndham, more cheerfully still. "Oh! how glad I should be if it were so. Twitters, you must try to manage it, my pet. He will always do most for you."

Twitters coloured a little, and the soft arms relaxed their hold as she answered :

"Could not you do it as well, Auntie?"

"I! I never can do anything for myself. And of that sort! Why I should just get so nervous that grandpapa would fly into a rage at the very beginning. My dear child, it makes me quite warm to think of it; but you, who never mind—— Ah!" and her voice suddenly changed; "what a selfish creature I am!

My poor child, I had quite forgotten. Oh, of course, they cannot come here."

"Why not? and what had you forgotten, Auntie?" asked Twitters, very pale, but as coolly as possible.

"*You*. Ah! how could I be so thoughtless! You could not like to meet them."

"No," said Twitters, still quite calmly, though her poor little face was now as red as fire. She hid it quietly against the widow's bosom and went on: "No, I should not like that. I do not mean because I care for him still, or because he did care for me (she was fibbing now, and knew it; so gave a big gulp), "but it would be awkward and unpleasant for—for both of us. He might think I had not forgotten, and—oh! no, I *could* not meet them just yet; but that is no reason they should not come here."

"No reason, indeed, my darling child!"

and Mrs. Wyndham fell to kissing and fondling the young thing at her feet—caresses which Twitters received and returned with equal warmth, till she was able to say :

“I could go away.”

“Very likely ! My dear, what do you think me ? I am a foolish, selfish woman, I know. I love my boy’s society dearly ; but not to that extent. What, send you away that *his* wife may come here ? Never ! ”

“No, not send me away, but let me go for a little,” replied Twitters. “Does it not occur to you, Auntie, that I deserve a holiday at times ? Most girls get them now and then, you know, and I think I should really like one now. It would do me good. No, you needn’t look anxious ; I am quite well, perfectly ; but, oh ! I *am* tired—not of you or the squire, I don’t

mean that, but of being always here, always in the same place, thinking the same thoughts, saying the same things, from year's end to year's end. Do not *you* find me very wearisome sometimes? I often feel so stupid and tired of myself that I wonder people can bear the sight of me. And now—see! we shall be together all our lives—why not spare me after the wedding for a little while and have your boy with you? There, you smile! Say you will; and I will do the coaxing of grandpapa for you.”

“I think you are an angel, child,” said poor Mrs. Wyndham, stroking the fair young face, which looked, indeed, as if its owner wanted change of air, it was so pale and thin just now. “But where would you go? I don’t believe it is for your own pleasure at all. Ah! if only Rex had been

wiser, and——” An almost stern pressure of the hand silenced her. Twitters, so soft usually, would hear no more on *that*.

“Hush!” she said, in her clear, bird-like voice. “There, I don’t mean to be cross, so lean back and I’ll tell you my plans. You know Miss Curtis, the dear old maid at Ingleby Court? Well, she is going to Switzerland, and she wants me to go with her. Now all is said. May I go?”

“That grim woman! My love, her very bonnet-strings terrify me, they are so wide and crackle so noisily.”

“She is never grim to me: nobody is, and I like her. Indeed, Auntie, I don’t think there’s a better or more charitable woman living.”

“But this war! Twitters, I *won’t* let you go. No one is going abroad this year; it is not safe.”

“Miss Curtis is going, and this Franco-Prussian war doesn’t interfere with Switzerland. Come, Auntie, say yes, and recollect for your reward you will have your darling with you again.”

“Ah! and I do so long to see him. Dear child, is this really your wish?”

A question like this could only be a signal of yielding, and so Twitters took it. A few more kisses, a little more coaxing, and the day was won; after which the triumphant victor slipped away to the garden, and burying herself in a small clematis-covered summer-house at the bottom of the rose-walk, where she and Rex used often to repair to read Tennyson together, drew from her bosom a plain silver locket that the squire had given her on one of her birthdays, and began lavishing childish kisses on it, while hot

tears rained down from the big blue eyes, dulling the silver rim, and almost hiding the handsome, manly face which seemed to smile on her good-temperedly from within it.

“And no wonder,” the poor child sobbed out, “when I am so silly ; but I can’t help it, dear, I can’t, because I am going away. You don’t know it, and, perhaps, you wouldn’t care much now, but I am ; and you are to come back here, and bring *her*, and be happy and forgiven. The squire must forgive you ; and it’s much better I should go ; for I should only embarrass you and be in the way ; but oh, Rex, Rex, I am so very unhappy. Oh, my love, I want you so badly ; and I can’t help it if it’s wicked ; for I *do*.”

There was a rustling behind the sweet-briar hedge at one side of the summer-

house ; but *Twitters* did not hear it, or pay attention if she did. Outside there was a fresh breeze blowing and chasing the white cloud-wreaths over a clear blue sky. The sun shone brightly on the waving fields of corn, whose heavy red heads bowed themselves in waiting for the sickle, and flickered through the green branches of over-arching trees on big, loaded wains which creaked and rumbled as they wended their slow, ponderous way along the narrow lanes. In the garden the bees kept up a drowsy humming over beds of crimson phlox and white and rose-coloured asters ; and. gaudy, gold - barred wasps whizzed and banged themselves against the downy cheeks of purple plums and luscious peaches hanging ripe and mellow on the sunny orchard wall. Nature was all alive with sound and sunshine, with

the laughter of the gleaners from the meadow above the Hall and the gurgle of the streamlet in the shrubbery below. Why should Twitters start or rouse herself from her girlish grief for a rustle in the hedge, or a swaying of the rose-branches? Yet she might have done so had she noticed what caused the swaying—a hand, brown and sinewy, which, inserted among the stems, was trying with great care to bend them on one side, so as to allow its owner to see within; while at the same time a man's head and two dark, glittering eyes peered over the thorny, leaf-covered sprays. Twitters' face was hidden in her hands as she sat on the floor of the summer-house, with her elbows resting on the bench which ran round it, where she and Rex had often sat side by side or played with their toys in childhood.

“But we shall never come here again, you and I—never any more,” moaned the poor child; and though the words were not audible outside, the faint sobbing murmur reached the ears of the man, and made him lean more forward, and risk more than one scratch, as he stretched his neck for the glimpse of crumpled gingham gown and gleam of golden hair, which was all he could achieve.

“Not *she*, at all events,” he muttered to himself; “yet they said at Baden she had gone to join her lover. Perhaps he is not here, either. I had better enquire of one of the field hands yonder. A nice sell to have come all this journey for nothing!”

CHAPTER VI.

“WHAT do you think we had better do, my dear? I see no officials, and there doesn't seem the smallest chance of getting on to-night. Dear me, what a terrible crowd!”

Is it possible to mistake an English-woman and a spinster, let one meet her where one will? The lady of middle age and austere appearance who gave vent to the above remarks in decidedly querulous accents might have borne a label with the said description printed on her chest; so unmistakably did she wear the *cachet* of either character in the thin, sandy-grey hair,

rigidly smooth in bands upon the temples, the prim lines about the mouth, the angular figure, grey alpaca waterproof, and thick, serviceable boots which went to make up her *tout ensemble*. She was seated on a large trunk close to the edge of the platform of a small railway-station about ten miles from Metz, and appealing to a young girl who stood beside her gazing with wide, bewildered eyes at a motley herd of soldiers, some in one uniform, some another, but all belonging to the Prussian army, and now crowding pell mell into the railway carriages *en route* for Metz.

“Ask someone if it really *is* the last train,” the elderly lady went on as her companion made no answer. “If it is, I don’t see what we can do. There are no houses near, or any place where we could put up for the night. It is dreadful !”

The girl glanced round her, and after a moment's hesitation ventured to touch very timidly the arm of a huge, brawny sergeant of cuirassiers, and to proffer the question in exceedingly Anglicised German. To her great relief, however, the man turned round and answered quite civilly: Yes, it was the last train. That was why they were crowding so. Bazaine was expected to make a sortie on a grand scale in a day or so; and they were coming up from Sedan with reinforcements. Why did the Fraulein wish to know? *She* was not going to Metz of a certainty?

"Yes, but we are, indeed. This lady and I belong to the Geneva corps—Colonel Lloyd Lindsay—you have heard of him, perhaps?"

"*Ach*, truly, Fraulein. A brave 'Englander,' indeed. And so you are going to

join the ambulances. But surely you are very young for that?"

"One can stand hard work and exposure better for being young and active, friend."

"True! But there are scenes—horrors. Has the Fraulein seen anything of war already!"

"I have seen the wounded men in the hospitals at Strasbourg. It was the sight of their sufferings which made us wish to help those who must suffer so much more upon the battle-field."

"Suffer! Ah, the Fraulein does not guess! It is horrible, fiendish! A girl should not even have it in her dreams. But there is the bugle! There will be a train at three o'clock to-morrow morning if the ladies can pass the night here." And the sergeant dashed off to join his company; while in another minute the long, heavily-

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laden train, teeming with eager heads, and bristling with weapons, rumbled past, fuming, jolting, and puffing like some monstrous, overgorged leviathan.

“What *shall* we do?” said the elder woman despairingly. “Amy, you must be famished.”

“Not at all. That roll and cup of coffee at the last station but one has set me up for the next dozen hours. I expected to have to rough it, you know. You told me so at the beginning.”

“Yes, I know; but——”

“*You* are not flagging, are you, my dear Miss Curtis?”

“Only on your account, Amy. I begin to think I should never have let you come.”

“I’m afraid I should have come whether you had let me or not. You

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don't know how wilful I am ; and please don't fret yourself about me. Do I look such a poor, helpless creature?"

Miss Curtis—she *was* a grim, lantern-jawed, bristly old maid to look at, but she had the tenderest heart in creation—took the younger face into her bony, large-veined hands, and answered :

"You look a great deal too young and bright and pretty to be here, dear child."

"Then I wish I were old and hideous, as old as Methuselah and as hideous as Hecate if you like," said Twitters (who I don't suppose needs introducing to the reader) in a petulant tone. "Now don't let us stay out here in the dews and damp. We can sit by the station fire till three—I daresay they will let us—and I'll make you a couch with the cloaks. Ah! there's a boy at last. Boy!" (and here the broken

German came into play again), "will you come here and help me with this box?"

"Plait-il, mademoiselle?"

"Ah! how stupid I am. Of course they are all French here. Come and take a handle of this box, and help me with it into the station. Thanks then. There are a couple of sous for you; and now, Miss Curtis, let me make you comfortable."

Poor Miss Curtis had travelled many a weary mile that day, had had no dinner, and, not being buoyed up by a girl's vivacity, was fairly nodding with fatigue. She hardly spoke while Twitters busied herself in making a nest of cloaks and shawls on the floor near the station fire; and made but a feeble protest when urged to settle into it, lean her back against the box, and go to sleep. The last injunction, indeed, was obeyed in about three minutes,

and Twitters, seeing her companion comfortably *hors de combat*, seated herself on an overturned hamper, and, resting her pretty head against the stone chimney, gave herself up to musings more painful than pleasant to judge from the expression of her features. How did she come there, so far from home, so far from even the safe and beaten track in that unsafe and troublous year of 1870, when all Europe was shaken by the cannon thunder of the great war between France and Germany? What had brought our simple, softly-nurtured little heroine into the very heart of the carnage; a girl who had never before left her quiet, country home, into places and scenes every one of which was equally strange and repulsive to her? Well, the answer is simple enough; the same that, according to a certain witty Frenchman,

lies at the root of most women's actions, "*La femme le vent*;" and against that answer what mere arguments prove of any avail?

In their quiet retreat in Switzerland the hearts of both ladies had been stirred to their very depths by the harrowing accounts, which even yet have not had time to grow dull in our memories, of a war unrivalled in all ages for the wholesale magnitude of its butchery; and Miss Curtis in especial felt, in reading and listening to them, that a new field had opened before her for her benevolence. She was a woman whose great *forte* in life was charity; not the merely passive charity which "thinketh no evil, suffereth long, and is kind," but that which feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. For years she had distributed flannel petticoats, instituted

soup-kitchens, and been robbed from the right hand while she gave from the left; but now a higher and grander work rose before her. People by tens, hundreds, aye, thousands, were dying in untold agonies within a few miles of her—dying for want of nurses, for want of medicine, for want of food and covering; and Miss Curtis, who prided herself on her efficiency as a nurse, and possessed a comfortable and unencumbered income, felt her spirit burn within her to join the charitable sisterhood then flocking from all parts to the seat of war under the banner of the scarlet cross. She told *Twitters* so at last, and proposed to send her home under charge of some fellow travellers, while she herself set out on her crusade of benevolence; but to her surprise the girl indignantly scouted the proposition. Go home, indeed! Why, she

had been trying for days to summon courage to beg Miss Curtis to allow her to go to Lorraine with the next party of sisters of charity travelling thither. What home had she either? Who wanted her? No one, for Mrs. Wyndham had her son and daughter-in-law elect with her by now, and not for kingdoms would she return to Gorseleigh while Rex was there. With all the earnestness and vitality of her nature she poured out entreaties and arguments to induce Miss Curtis not to send her away, and with the success which usually attended this spoilt little damsel's persuasions. Her old friend held out as long as she could, remonstrated, reasoned, threatened to write to the Wyndhams, even shed tears, and in the end, though protesting to the last that it was against both her will and conscience, yielded.

They had travelled leisurely enough as far as Strasbourg, at the sight of which ruined and mutilated city Miss Curtis lifted up her hands and wept, and where a merely cursory view of the hospitals had convinced her that, go where she might, she could find no better field for her labours. A walk through one of the wards, indeed, sent her back to *Twitters* (whom she had left under the care of another member of the corps) in floods of tears, tears which her tender-hearted companion shed as freely when she heard of a mother and child lying in the same bed both frightfully mutilated by the shell which had killed the father and another babe in the mother's arms; of a young girl, whose fearfully disfigured face rendered her loathsome to look on, hanging over the pallet of an aged grandmother mortally wounded by a round shot; and of a

convalescent soldier, his right arm still in a sling, tending with a woman's gentleness two poor little wounded boys whose parents had both perished in the awful bombardment of "Strasbourg the beautiful."

These and many more scenes of a similar kind convinced Miss Curtis that no good could accrue from their going farther, and that more than enough of work, hard work too, lay ready to their hand. Twitterers, however, thought otherwise. Horrible as were the misery and suffering at Strasbourg there was this consolation, that everything that *could* be done for the wounded was being done. There were some hospitals there, if not enough. There were doctors and nurses, stores of medicines, and scores of nuns and other charitable women working like horses to alleviate the horrors around them ; but elsewhere, near Paris,

aye, and at Metz, where the war was still holding its bloody tournament, and where Prince Frederick Charles kept siege around Marshal Bazaine with the dogged pertinacity of a cat watching a mouse, there, indeed, was help wanted, and help of every sort. *There* was an insufficient ambulance corps, a scanty supply of army surgeons, a miserable paucity, if not an absolute dearth, of nurses, comforts, and even shelter or bedding for the wounded. Twitters saw Colonel Lloyd Lindsay once, and heard him bitterly deploring the uncared for state of the mutilated soldiers, festering and dying by tens and twenties in the ditches and cabins near the environs of Metz; and from that moment her cry was "Forward!" Indeed, she gave Miss Curtis no peace till she got her way about it; but read aloud to her every harrowing detail from the seat of

war, and so worked on her companion's feelings, that by the end of the week they and their baggage were actually ensconced in a railway carriage *en route* for Metz, about ten miles from which noted and venerable city we have just found them.

With the first dawn of day, or rather before it came, both ladies were again astir, and some miles on their journey: neither of them, as may well be believed, much refreshed by their comfortless night in the station room. Miss Curtis, who was by no means inured to hardships, complained of rheumatic pains in her back and legs; while Twitters, who had not lain down at all, but had sat patiently by the chimney all night, thinking of Rex and wondering if he had quite forgotten her, and were as happy again as he used to be, looked so wan and weary that even the

guard pitied the pale little English *fraulein*, and made interest with a burly Prussian to change into a carriage where there was palpably no room for him, in order to give the girl a little more space to stretch her tired limbs. Fortunately for their future guidance an elderly army surgeon, also Prussian by nation, but speaking excellent French and a little English, was in the same compartment with the two ladies; and on finding out the object of their journey, he not only overwhelmed them with expressions of admiration and respect, but when, at about eight o'clock, the slow, overladen train reached the outposts of the Red Prince's army, he took them to his own quarters, plied them with hot coffee and cherry brandy, and insisted on their taking at least an hour's rest before starting,

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under the care of his servant, to find the ambulance department; all of which acts of kindness were more than appreciated by his frail fellow-travellers.

Miss Curtis, warmed and comforted by her coffee and beefsteak, fell asleep almost as soon as she had finished them; but, tired as Twitters felt, she was too much excited to follow her friend's example. The occasional volleys of musketry, interspersed with the deep booming of cannon coming up from the beleaguered city, the bustle and confusion all around her, the rows on rows of snow-white tents, the shrill alarums of the bugle, the beating of drums, stamping of horses' feet and hosts of armed men, all strung her nerves to such a pitch that, after a few moments' vain effort at repose, she sprang off the couch on which she had been reclining, and repaired to the door of

the hut to take a good look at the surrounding scenes, all so strange to her, so terrible, and so eloquent of war in its mightiest and bloodiest form.

The surgeon's hut—a small cabin built of logs and thatched with straw—was built on the side of a hill about a mile from the village of Corny, and not fifty yards from the dilapidated ruin of St. Blaize, the Prussian observatory. Right in front, across the valley, was the grim fort of St. Quentin, from which the French were even then maintaining a sullen but tolerably unceasing fire, and which was now and then almost hidden from the girl's view by the grey clouds of smoke constantly belching from its black embrasures. On the left were Fort St. Privat and the little village of Jouy; while curling round the foot of the hill swept a broad,

powerful stream, rippled by a light breeze, and covered with numberless rafts, boats, and pontoons—the waters of the “blue Moselle!” Beyond the besieged city itself, the grand old cathedral of which stood out in clear relief against the pale, cloudless blue of the autumnal sky, Twitters could see sundry small villages half hidden in trees, and occupied by the French outposts; while on the right lay the little village of Peltre, and, still nearer the Moselle, Papetrie, both occupied by the Prussians, as she could tell by the Black Eagle waving over their red tiled roofs, as well as many other outposts on either side of the river. Here and there a great column of black smoke rising from behind a belt of trees gave evidence of a burning hamlet; and not far off, in the midst, perhaps, of a devastated garden or trodden-down corn-

field, rose a cluster of huts with the Red Cross, Twitters' own badge, flying above their roofs ; while on every side, up steep ravines, down grassy valleys, through green fields and clumps of forest trees, might be seen parties of soldiers ; some on foot, some on horseback, some deployed along a road-way ; some firing at an unseen enemy, some dragging heavy guns up to the principal points of attack.

No better view could anyone have had of the fair city of Metz and its environs, its flowery champaign, and the tri-forked branches of its noble river—a view in better days glorious beyond description, though now it only brought the tears into Twitters' eyes by the horror of its sadness. Verily, it was the “abomination of desolation” which now reigned over the city ; and as the English girl

stood there gazing at the scene before her, and shivering at each recurring thunder from St. Quentin or Privat, she could not help thinking of those old days long back, when Charles the Fifth besieged the royal city for seventy days, only to be repulsed at last "with dire loss and mortification to the king." Was *this* siege to end in the same manner? Would Bazaine, failing to hold the city, manage to cut a path through the invading army and escape? Looking at the masses of the Prussian forces at her feet, Twitters thought not, and in her heart she prayed: "Anything but a bombardment. Anything but a second Strasbourg! Good Lord, deliver Thy people, and stay this slaughter."

CHAPTER VII.

"It seems to me, Ada, that we have been even more fortunate than I expected. Upon my soul this is a grand old place. How do you feel in it?"

"Well enough for the present. It is horribly old-fashioned though; and once I am in it for good I expect it will look rather different."

"I doubt if you'll make it any better. Women are always for altering and changing; but it could hardly be a finer old pile than at present."

"You said yourself it wanted a billiard-room."

“And a proper smoking-room. Yes; but those are things that will come naturally with the new generation. You’ll have to be cautious, Ada; I can tell you that. You *must* be even more cautious now. I can’t say how annoyed I was at the slip you made to-day.”

“What slip? I don’t know what you mean, Bertie.”

“About that garden at the side of the house. I could see that even Mrs. Wyndham, bloodless and inert as she is, coloured up and looked distressed; while Mr. Reginald could hardly bite his lips tightly enough to keep in his annoyance.”

“I’ll teach Mr. Reginald to bite his lips at me in after days! But how absurd, Bertie! Mrs. Wyndham never does a hand’s turn to the arrangement of the gardens (I had found out that already); and as the

windows of her morning-room look out on that part (by-the-way, *I* want that room for my own sanctum one of these days ; it has the prettiest window in the house), I should have thought she would have been gratified by my wanting to make it pretty for her. Horrid old patch of weeds—for one can't call those things flowers which no one dreams of planting nowadays—she ought to have been grateful to me for offering to take it in hand."

"Then she was very much the reverse ; and if you had taken the trouble to 'find out' a little more, I dare say you'd have seen as much for yourself, and known the why and wherefore. As I told you before, you must make sure you can walk before you attempt to run. But there ! I knew you would be bungling ; and I'm glad I'm here now to look after you."

"Then let me tell you, Bertie, the hardest piece of work I've had to do here was the getting you asked. Sir Wyndham Wyndham seemed obstinately determined *not* to see any hints or suggestions on the subject; and if I hadn't managed to get that poor weak Mrs. W. alone, and talk of you in a way that left her no resource but an invitation to you, I don't believe I could have done it. As for Reggie, he was *particularly* disagreeable on the subject."

"In what way?"

"Wouldn't help me in the least; said it was natural his family should prefer to have me by myself at first so as to know me better; that I must remember his grandfather had not the pleasure of your acquaintance; and that for his part he thought it was just as well, for he was sure

you were far too unlike in your ways to get on well together."

"Much obliged to him, I'm sure ! I'm vexed, though, at what you say of the old boy. I told you I was pretty certain they had been making enquiries before Sir Wyndham sent his ultimatum ; and I fancied the old boy carried a pretty stiff neck when I arrived yesterday evening. Wonder *what* he found out !"

"Nothing very bad, you may be sure, or he never would have given in to the marriage at all, or asked me here. I daresay there's been some talk of play, but nothing tangible, and you know what these sort of people are. Why a game of beggar-my-neighbour is dissipation to them."

"H'm, well, I hope it is as you think ; d—— them and their straight-lacedness ! And how do you get on yourself, with the

baronet especially? Do you think you have made a good impression? I thought him very attentive to you at meals."

"He always is. That is part of his grand ways; but—I don't know. He *does* admire me. I can tell that. Besides, I made Reggie own that he had said so."

"We counted on that. Well, Ada, if you can't work up admiration into something warmer with an old-fashioned squire like that, who can hardly have come across half-a-dozen charming women in a century——"

"His son didn't, to judge from the washed-out specimen of a wife he chose. Could she ever have been even decent-looking? And a half idiot into the bargain."

"All the easier to win to your service. I am sure I could get on swimmingly with Mrs. Wyndham."

"I hope you will; for it's more than I can. There is nothing so prejudiced as a fool, and I am sure that woman can't bear me, for all the efforts she makes to hide it, and be kind and affectionate to me for her son's sake. And there's another thing I've found out, Bertie, that I must tell you. I am quite certain she has tried all she can to make up a match between Reggie and that companion of hers, who is gone away at present; and is horribly disappointed at having failed. I wonder if Rex had a *penchant* for the young lady at any time."

"If there is any suspicion of it it was more than foolish of you to allude to her as slightly as you did at breakfast. I fancied he looked a little huffy."

"I knew it, and that was what made me snub him about the ride this morning."

“Yes, before his mother, who adores him, and evidently has no idea that any-one *could* controvert his wishes! Ada, you are incorrigible, and I believe you will ruin your own game yet.”

“I hope not; for I agree with you now that it is worth playing. One can’t always be a Griselda, however, and—— Hush, here comes my young lord. Now, Bertie, to show I don’t bear you malice for your lecturing, you shall see how good I’ll be.”

They were walking together, the two Scotts, in one of the glades of Gorseleigh Park—he quiet, gentlemanly, and invalidish-looking, in an entire suit of light-grey tweed, which somehow seemed to take the little amount of colour out of his skin which might be there; she beautiful and dazzling as ever, in a morning robe of pale lemon-coloured cambric, adorned with innumerable

little frills and puffings edged with delicate lace, and wearing on her head a picturesque, broad-brimmed hat of coarse straw, shaded by feathers of the same tint as her dress. Exceedingly well she looked, with a natural colour in her cheek which enabled her to dispense with her usual touch of rouge, and a brilliancy in her large, flashing eye which told already of the pride of conquest, the pardonable self-satisfaction of the future Lady Wyndham of Gorseleigh. Indeed, her brother might well tell her they had been more fortunate than they had expected. He had only bargained for an invitation to the young couple *after* their marriage, calculating in so doing that the Wyndhams would be too proud to let their neighbours guess, by any slight to the young heir's bride, that his choice of her had been made without their consent or

approval. But on the other hand he had forgotten (not being troubled with such feelings himself) to calculate for the tender, homely, family affection which made the absence of one a grief to all, for Twitters' unselfish magnanimity, or the Squire's loneliness without his grandson; and therefore the note from Mrs. Wyndham to her son, begging him to bring his betrothed down to be introduced to them, and spend a week or so at the Hall before his marriage, was as much a surprise to the Scotts as it was a subject for congratulation. As for Rex, he accepted the invitation gratefully but without much gladness. A pencilled postscript in his mother's letter had let him know that Twitters was away; and that being so he felt tolerably indifferent whether he went or stayed. It would be hard to see Adelaide in *her* place, to have

to wander about with her and do the lover in the very walks and copses where he and his blue-eyed darling had so often strayed ; and now that the glamour was gone from before his own eyes, he rather dreaded what his mother and grandfather would think of those bold, black ones of his *fiancée*, and of the ways of speaking and acting so different to anything they had been accustomed to, or were likely to approve. He was ready to do Adelaide all loyal duty, to fight her battles, stand up for her if attacked, and defend her if criticised, to pay her in every way the attention she had a right to expect at his hands ; but there was no gladness in his homage, no sunshine in his heart ; and though it was with an emotion of relief and thankfulness that he noticed—without understanding the motive—that Adelaide's dress, language,

and demeanour at Gorseleigh were all sufficiently subdued and different from what he had been used to in her not to shock or startle the old people, the instinctive, though unacknowledged, consciousness that she was acting a part only alienated him further from her, and made him feel more keenly the contrast between her and the little orphan maiden whose presence, do what he would, he missed more every day of his visit.

There was one thing that puzzled him. For some time back he had been pretty nearly convinced, not only that Adelaide simply cared for him as the presumptive heir of Gorseleigh, but that, being decidedly keen in seeing through disguises, she had a very tolerable idea of the coolness of his own affection for her. Indeed, when quite alone with him, she often treated him with

the most unconcealed coldness, not to say antagonism, scoffed at and snubbed him, and did not scruple to express her sense of the dulness of Downshire in general, and the weariness, not to say contempt, with which his mother and the few neighbouring ladies who visited at the Hall inspired her. Yet to every suggestion of returning to London she returned a decided negative, and even assumed a persistent deafness to one or two delicate hints that they had already outstayed the length of their invitation; while in public, and even now and then when alone, she manifested a tender, maidenly, confiding attachment to him which was only surpassed by her almost servile admiration of and devotion to the baronet. For the latter, indeed, she had nothing but the brightest smiles and prettiest speeches, saucy, coaxing, or sub-

missive, and calculated either to flatter his vanity or awaken his admiration. She even read his character well enough to treat Mrs. Wyndham (before him) with admirably daughter-like gentleness and deference, affecting to ask the latter's opinion on subjects on which she knew the poor lady was hopelessly ignorant, and to look, oh! so sorry, when the old gentleman so far forgot his chivalry as to snub his meek daughter-in-law before her, or allowed himself to be beguiled by the young lady's manœuvring into saying something which she knew would jar on the widow's feelings or go contrary to her wishes.

Indeed, looking at the dead set Miss Scott was making at his grandfather, and the pertinacity with which she clung to her foothold in Gorseleigh, even extracting an invitation for her brother from poor,

gentle Mrs. Wyndham, and receiving continual relays of boxes and parcels from London, although the wedding-day remained fixed for barely a fortnight hence, it had begun to dawn upon Rex that her design was to be married if possible from the Hall, and afterwards to make her home there indefinitely, and the calm audacity of the idea so staggered him, that it was not till he had had some hours for its contemplation that he made up his mind that it should not be allowed to succeed by his consent or connivance. The Squire, he knew well, had not the slightest intention of the sort; and as he felt convinced in his own mind that Twitters' absence would be commensurate with the length of their visit, he was determined that neither should be protracted any longer than he could help.

On the present day Adelaide's injudicious sneer at the absent girl, and subsequent ill-temper and churlishness to himself, had additionally hardened him against her, and acted as a mental tonic; so that when he came to seek her in the park it was with the intention of putting before her more plainly than he had liked to do hitherto that, whether she chose to stay or not, *he* must return to London in the course of the next few days at latest, and that there he meant to remain until after their marriage.

But when he saw her coming out from under the branching limes to meet him, with the sunlight in her beautiful eyes, and the undulating shadow of her glorious figure seeming to kiss the grass to deeper emerald behind her, while the flicker of sun and shade through the arch of living

green overhead blended in a thousand broken lights and tender half tints over her face and form, he could not help thinking to himself with an emotion of pride that it would be difficult to find a grander specimen of womankind, and experiencing something of the same thrill of admiration which he used to feel for her in the first days of their acquaintance; and when Captain Scott greeted him with a brotherly "Ha, Rex, grudging me even a half hour with this truant sister of mine! Well, take her if you will, for I must go back to the house and write a letter, so I won't rob you any longer;" and Adelaide, drawing one hand through his arm, said in a low tone, and with a smile half playful, half penitent: "Dear Reggie, he knows his Ada is always glad to be taken by him;" Rex

felt that a flush of half shame, half embarrassment was coming over his face, and his resolution fast melting away. Unfortunately for Ada, however, her next words, prompted by the desire to act on her brother's hints, and smooth down any rough places she might have made, acted as an assistance to him.

"I have been wishing you would come," she said softly, and linking the other hand in that already within his arm, "for I knew I had been cross and naughty this morning, and I was afraid you were angry. You will forgive me though, dear, will you not? for the real truth of the matter is that I woke up with a dreadful headache; and when I came down to breakfast it was so bad that I could hardly speak, far less say anything pleasant to anybody. Bertie, who knows my headaches well, says *he* could see I was

nearly distracted, and was very sorry for me ; but of course *you* could not guess what was the matter, and I am afraid I made myself dreadfully disagreeable to you."

Now, all this was said in the sweetest manner ; but somehow it did not bear even the faintest impress of truth about it ; and though Rex felt bound as a lover to say she had not been disagreeable to him, and to ask how the head was then, he believed so little in its sufferings that after a minute he felt emboldened to add :

"I did mean to ask you, however, Ada, not to say any more about alterations in the bees' garden, as we call that at the side of the house. My mother is very delicate and nervous, and any suggestions of change are always unpleasant to her ; besides which she has certain associations connected with that plot of ground which we all respect.

My father laid it out for her as it is, and while she was able she always cultivated and attended to it herself, never letting a gardener into it except for such digging and mowing as would be beyond a woman's strength. Since her strength failed her Twitt—Miss Travers has taken the task from her, and devoted herself to it so zealously and lovingly that it has become additionally endeared to my mother, who now associates it with both her husband and her adopted child. I do not think even my grandfather would voluntarily alter a plant in it; and therefore I saw my mother was pained when you, who are still but a comparative stranger to her, expressed such contempt for its old-fashioned arrangement, and determination to induce the Squire to have it completely remodelled."

For one moment in this speech Adelaide

felt as if, despite all Captain Scott's warnings, she must cast prudence and temper to the winds and give her tongue the rein. So it was *Miss Travers* again, was it? whose clumsy gardening was to be held in such respect that any comment from her, the future mistress of the house, must be regarded as an impertinence and met with a reprimand. In very dread for her own sake of what she *might* say if she said anything at all she managed to hold her tongue; but her bosom heaved so violently, and the scarlet blood rushed in such a vivid volume to her cheeks, that Reginald could not help seeing the effect of his words, and instead of going on to allude to their departure, as he had intended, felt obliged to add:

"I hope you are not vexed with me, Ada, for saying this. You must know that I

should not have done so if I had not felt certain that the last thing you could wish would be to hurt, even unintentionally, my poor little mother's feelings ; and if I were not so anxious, honestly anxious, that she should be a mother to you, too, and love you as much as—as I am sure she wishes to do." Reginald had meant to say, "as you deserve ;" but somehow honesty put in a protest there, and he finished his sentence differently. It did not matter much. Miss Scott had had time to recover her self-command, and to answer with a smile sweet enough to reassure any lover.

"Dear Rex, how could I be angry ? I am so glad you told me, for of course it was not a thing I *could* have guessed, could I ? And the only little bit that hurts me is that dear mamma, as I love to call her, should still look on me as even in part a stranger.

We must try to teach her differently, and let her feel that now she has a daughter she need no longer be dependent on the attentions of a companion, who of course can never be as near to her as *us*."

Poor Rex! If he had been foolish and fickle he was certainly punished by the twinge inflicted on him through this speech, and all the more because when Adelaide said sweetly: "But, love, you still look grave; and you had such a *very* black look when you came to meet us just now. Surely there must be something else the matter besides this little trifle, which I will soon repair?" he could not say out the truth, but was fain to find some other excuse, and answered:

"Oh, I suppose I was thinking of something I had just heard, and which worried

me. Transom, our butler, tells me that there has been a foreign-looking man hanging round the place, and asking all sorts of questions of the servants and lodge-keepers: questions chiefly about you and your brother, Ada, and——”

“About *us* !”

The words came hardly above a whisper, and Miss Scott's face had turned deadly white; but Rex was not looking at her, and went on:

“Yes, I suppose you are surprised; and, indeed, I shouldn't have told you, only that I know you are not in the least timid or nervous. It seems he has been trying to find out how long you've been here, when we are going to be married, and where; and if (since you have had so many things down from London) it is not to take place here; and my idea is that he is

one of a band of burglars—perhaps the very party who broke into Lord ——'s house, and stole his bride's jewels, the day after the marriage. They may have got wind of the arrival of those very boxes of yours, and fancy there are jewels and other things of value among their contents; and, if so, I think it is fortunate he has been imprudent enough in his enquiries to put us on our guard. I told Transom he ought to have informed me the instant he heard of it; but I think there is plenty of time as it is, for the man must be lodging somewhere in the vicinity, as he was talking to the gamekeeper's daughter only yesterday; and it can't be difficult to hunt out a dark-looking man with an American accent (Transom declares he speaks through his nose with a twang) in this little place. I am going to

Daneminster this afternoon to see the inspector of police there about it; and, as my grandfather is a magistrate, we can easily——”

“Oh, no, no, Reggie, don’t!—pray don’t go to the police. Oh, let him alone!”

Miss Scott was whiter than ever, and trembling from head to foot, as if in an ague fit. Her lover looked at her in amazement. Certainly, if he had put her down as not nervous, he must have been mistaken.

“Don’t!” she repeated, clutching his hand in her hot, shaking fingers. “What is he to you—or us? Even if he is a thief, we can take care of our property; and you know it is going away. I—I have been thinking for some days that our visit ought to come to an end. Bertie

wants me at home ; and you will go back with us, will you not ? Reggie, let the poor man alone. After all, he—he—has done nothing.”

CHAPTER VIII.

TWITTERS, whom we left so far away from home and Gorseleigh and all those with whom her life had been bound up to now —Twitters in her grey dress and hood, and with the curly rings of her fair hair blowing about her brow in the fresh autumnal breeze, was still standing where we described her, at the door of the surgeon's hut, when she heard a rumbling close by, and looking to the side whence it came, saw a cart containing two soldiers and a sister of charity coming up the rough stony path towards her. It stopped close to the cottage door, that the soldier driving it might

adjust a piece of the harness, and Twitters looked curiously at the "sister," who returned the gaze with interest; and after a keen glance at the dress and badge, as well as at the bright, earnest face, bent forward and beckoned the young girl to her.

"You belong to the Geneva corps, Fraulein, is it not so?" she asked, speaking in some German *patois* rather difficult to understand; and Twitters answered eagerly in the affirmative.

"Are you occupied? Have you sick in here?"

"No one at all, Sister. I—we, that is, have only just arrived from Strasbourg."

"Then in God's name don't delay, but come with me. I have lint and other necessities here; but all the other sisters are already fully occupied, and I have only just heard that there are eleven wounded

men lying in a stable just outside Jouy. They have been there three days unattended, the poor souls. Will you come? One woman can do so very little for so many."

The Sister spoke in a quick, almost peremptory tone, like one not used to waste words, but it was not needed to compel an eager assent from Twitters. She dashed into the house on the instant to awaken Miss Curtis, and summon her to accompany them; but the sight of the poor woman still lying in the profound slumber of utter weariness, and with her kind, ugly face looking quite grey and worn, touched the girl's tender heart. She could not bear to awaken her when, perhaps, she herself might—proud thought—be sufficient assistance in the Sister's need; so merely waiting to scribble a few lines, which she laid beside

her friend, telling her where she had gone and with whom, and promising to rejoin her, as soon as released, at the ambulance department, she clambered up into the cart beside the nun, and set off in a breathless state of excitement.

A tedious and jolting ride it was through deep lanes and miry roads much cut up by the heavy wheels of artillery waggons, but it brought the little band of Good Samaritans before long to the dilapidated village of Jouy, and after passing through it, and crossing two or three fields, from which the crops had been gathered some time back, they arrived at a tumbledown-looking cattle-shed, which one of the soldiers pointed out as their destination, adding :

“ We brought the men there after the skirmish three days ago ; but we were too busy to think of them afterwards ; and

there are few passers-by here. I doubt whether all of them will be living now."

Twitters gave an involuntary shudder and turned pale, which the Sister observing, she said gently :

"You are not used to this sort of thing yet, my child?"

"Oh, no! I had only one week's experience at Strasbourg, and this is my first day in the field. I have never seen war before. Indeed, I hope I never shall again."

"Ah! it is very dreadful," replied the German nun, calmly. "May God forgive the French Emperor for bringing such miseries on these poor people. I have been with the army from the beginning; and if you could see my hair you would find it was quite grey; yet it was as light as yours when I left our convent in the Black Forest.

Is not that someone at the door?" she added suddenly, turning to the soldiers.

"It is the doctor, my Sister; he who sent us for help."

"*Ach!* but I can see already the gladness in his face. Well, Herr Doctor, we have brought you two nurses, you perceive."

"One nurse and one child!" growled the Doctor. "Come in, and welcome, my Sister. Here is work enough for three of you. Have you brought bandages and brandy?"

"Both, Herr Doctor. There is a case of things in the cart; and see—in my pocket—a bottle of chloroform."

"That is well, for I have none here; and there is a poor fellow who must lose his foot at once, and who is too badly wounded otherwise to have much strength to boast of. He is a French sergeant, too. I am

glad our fellows had the humanity to bring him in."

"Poor man! so am I. Little Sister, help me to carry in this case. *Ach, Gott!*"

The exclamation broke involuntarily from the good woman's lips as they entered the low-roofed, fetid hovel, where, lying on filthy straw trodden down by the cattle, and as close to each other as they could well be, were eleven ghastly forms, some doubled up in strange, contorted attitudes, and filling the shed with their groans and wails, others stretched out rigid and motionless as statues.

"Three dead," observed the Doctor, carelessly. "That one nearest you—you had better carry him outside, Max, we want all the room there is—and those two in the corner. Now, my sister, here is a poor fellow, out of whose shoulder I have just

fished a musket-ball, and who will be the better for some of your brandy. Will you see to him ; I think he has fainted. And you, Fraulein, come here. I hope you are handy."

He turned sharply to Twitters as he spoke, who sick and giddy at the sight of so many mutilated forms, at the cries which broke from the parched lips of the sufferers, and at the heavy, fearful smell which filled the place, had hard ado to keep herself from sinking to the ground.

"Yes, Herr Doctor, I—I believe so," she stammered, and instantly had a roll of bandages thrust into her hand.

"Heinrich will hold the man while I take off his foot," the Doctor went on rapidly ; "and you hold the bandages ready, and give me each as I want it.

So! Now, friend, I'm going to be merciful, and give you some chloroform."

"Not to me, monsieur," said the wounded man, speaking in a tone so feeble as to be barely audible. "I have disease of the heart, and——"

"Well, well, then bear it, that's all. It is only a trifle more courage. Here, Fraulein, a little closer."

The German soldier knelt down to raise the wounded leg, while with a rapid, skilful hand the surgeon cut the boot from the shattered foot, muttering the while:

"H'm—m, this is ugly, very ugly. Fraulein, my tools. Now, friend, courage. Hah! what is the reason of that?"

The exclamation was neither occasioned by scream or struggle from the Frenchman, who had simply set his teeth and clenched his hands; but by a sudden avalanche of

bandages, lint, and instruments tumbling into the surgeon's lap, a strangled little cry, a rustle, and fall, and a young lady lying in a little crumpled grey heap at the sufferer's side, her pretty fair hair staining itself in the bloody clay of the cabin floor.

For the first time in her life Twitters had fainted away.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" exclaimed the justly indignant Doctor. "Is this the way for nurses to behave? What ails her? I heard no shot; yet——"

"Monsieur," said the sergeant, faintly, "it appears to me that the sight of the wound caused mademoiselle to faint. *Pauvre jeune fille!* She has a sensitive heart."

"Heart be hanged!" exclaimed the angry Galen. "She is a fine lady; one

of your sentimental Englishwomen who come here and make a great noise and parade, and fill the English papers with letters about their usefulness, when they know no more of nursing wounded men than a cow, and can't even bear to look at a little blood. Heinrich, if you have a hand to spare, reach me that strip of linen; and you, my brave, take a pull of brandy to steady you again after that idiot's escapade. Well, Fraulein," as Twitters, whose fainting-fit had only lasted a minute or so, made an effort to get up, "what are you staring at? Do you not think you had better go outside? This is certainly no place for fine ladies."

The poor girl, who was now sitting up, feeling very giddy and bewildered, blushed piteously at this sarcasm. Not

that she resented it. On the contrary, she felt that he was right, and that she had, in fact, no business there; she who had thought she could be quite as useful as Miss Curtis, and who had disgraced herself so utterly at the first trial. And her eyes filled with hot, contrite tears as she answered humbly :

“ I am so very, *very* sorry, Herr Doctor. Oh, pray don't send me away.”

The surgeon paid no attention to her—how could he when he was busy taking off his patient's foot, while he held a strip of bandage between his teeth—and as soon as the last turn of the knife had severed the mangled member, Twitters summoned up courage to draw near, and gently take the poor man's head into her own lap, so as to raise it and make him easier while the doctor fastened the bandages, and then

repaired to the next patient, where Sister Gertrude was already waiting to assist him with the deftest fingers and readiest presence of mind in the world.

It must be said in behalf of our poor little heroine (and "a 'poor heroine,' indeed," I hear some of you say) that this was the first time she had ever come in contact with the actual horrors of the battle-field; and I fancy many a medical student will tell you that he felt very sick, and flinched like a coward, at his first sight of a bad operation. Besides, the girl had been travelling since morning of the previous day, had had no sleep, and only a hasty breakfast; and therefore naturally was as much weakened in her bodily powers as in her nerves. The first sight and smell of the interior of the shed had sickened her to the soul, and made

the floor seem to swim beneath her ; and when she saw the shattered foot uncovered, and the gleam of the lifted knife, her endurance suddenly gave way, and she succumbed altogether. Fortunately, the doctor said no more to her. He went busily from man to man, aided by Sister Gertrude and the two soldiers, and *Twitters* was left to sit on the ground and hold the Frenchman's head, now and then moistening his lips with brandy, or wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead, and too utterly crushed and humiliated to proffer further assistance. Little good she knew it would be to do so after her late failure ; but after a time the Sister came to her side and said :

“Should you be able to stay here for a little, and attend to these poor men by yourself ? There is nothing to be done

for them, remember that, but to give them drink when they want it, and ease the positions a little of any but those two, if they are in great pain. The doctor and his men are going elsewhere where they are more required, and I must return to the camp hospital for some blankets for these poor creatures; but they cannot be left alone, and as you do not know the way, it would be no use to send you."

"Oh! Sister, I shall be only too glad to stay. Indeed I want to be useful," cried poor Twitters, quite grateful to the nun for giving her an order, even though at the same moment her heart was beating fast with nervous alarm at the idea of being left alone with all those wounded and dying men, and with the deep boom of cannon and continuous rattle of musketry filling her ears, and making her nerves

quiver with the unaccustomed excitement. Not for worlds, however, would she have betrayed the latter feeling, and the nun, too used to war and its horrors to guess at her young companion's emotions, mounted into the cart again, and departed with a mind at rest.

For a minute or two Twitters sat still, murmuring to herself a little childish prayer for guidance and self-possession ; and then the cry of " Water ! Water !" from half-a-dozen fevered throats obliged her to lay her patient's head on a pillow hastily improvised of her own cloak, and to repair from one to another of the other wounded, giving them the drink they so eagerly craved. Not one of them seemed the better for it. Not one but moaned, " More, more !" as she turned from him to his neighbour. One clutched her arm in his

burning hand, and fairly pulled her on to her knees in the effort to retain her beside him. Another rolled over on his face in agony, making the walls echo with his groans ; while a third, a long-haired young German, with wild, light eyes, implored her in the most moving language to put a knife in his heart and so terminate his sufferings. From one to another she went for nearly an hour and a quarter, patient, tender, trembling with fear and pity, but unable to sit down, or even pause to reflect for a single moment, and beginning at last to count the minutes till Sister Gertrude's return. The only one who never cried out, who never asked her for anything, but lay silent, motionless, and apparently sinking fast, was the poor French sergeant. Whenever Twitters could she returned to him, smoothed his pillow, gave him drink, and

did all that lay in her power—little enough in truth—to alleviate his mortal sufferings. He seemed so weak as to be barely conscious ; but whenever she did anything for him his pale lips moved with the faint “ *Merci, m’demoiselle,*” which seemed to come almost mechanically ; and once when she was trying vainly to raise him on her weak girlish arm, that he might swallow more easily, he made shift to kiss the soft little hand which held the cup to his lips, and murmur : “ *Ne vous derangez pas, Mademoiselle. Ce sera bientôt fini.*”

Had all her patients been like the gentle sergeant Twitters might have fared better ; but among eight soldiers some must be hard to deal with, and one great Dutch clown, who had never known severe pain before, howled like a wild animal ; while another abused her coarsely for not

paying him more attention, until Twitters, frightened by the noise they made, and only half understanding their words, devoted herself to them so sedulously, that one of her quieter patients nearly died meanwhile for want of a little brandy; and it was only by unremitting care and attention for nearly ten minutes, during which tears of fright and self-reproach poured down Twitters' cheek, that he began to revive, and by-and-by was even able to thank her in a weak, guttural whisper.

But the poor child's great trial was yet to come—a trial before which the other experiences of the past hour and a half faded into nothing. The wild-eyed German student, having exhausted all his entreaties that she would put an end to his life, had for some time lain quiet enough save for a faint moaning. Presently, however,

he called her, and in broken English, so as to better ensure her understanding him, asked her to untie a bandage on his arm, averring that it hurt him.

He spoke very quietly, and Twitters, who did not know the nature of his wounds, was about to comply, when the thought came over her to ask :

“Are you sure, friend, it will not hurt you more to do so? It looks as if the doctor had fastened it so very carefully.”

“Ah! dat not vas de Doctor. Dat was de Seester, and she is ver careful; but she not know well how. See, mein Fraulein, eet is not bad hurt, only one scorch bruise; but these ties they fever it so tight. Weel you not have kindness to loose dem? I was student of medicine myself in Berlin, an’ know well all dese things.”

Thus assured Twitters did not hesitate

any longer, but, as well as the dim light of the cabin permitted, proceeded to unroll the bandage. She had undone the fastenings, and taken a few turns, when he put up his other hand to help her, begging her at the same time to throw his cloak over him. She complied, and had just turned away for a minute to answer a piteous cry from one of the others, when she heard the student say, with a weird smile on his ashen face :

“I sank you, leetle Fraulein. You ave done all I so weeshed. I die quick *now*.”

In an agony of fear and apprehension Twitters tore the cloak from the wounded man, and in one glance saw the extent of the mischief she had so unwittingly done. The bandage so carefully fastened had concealed a wounded artery, and he was already lying in a crimson pool of his own

blood. Before *Twitters'* nervous fingers had more than half achieved the lesson only once or twice before practised at Strasbourg all necessity for doing so was over. The man had bled to death !

Then it seemed to *Twitters* as if her reason were giving way altogether. She gazed for one moment at the stiffening corpse, whose grey features were still horribly irradiated by the mocking smile which had played on them in his last moments ; then clasped her hands wildly together, and broke into a loud fit of hysterical weeping. Her hands, her arms, her sleeves, the front of her dress, were all deeply stained with blood. There was blood on the floor, blood on the walls, blood on every side of her. She seemed to see nothing, breathe nothing, but the same ensanguined fluid. The very sky

peeping through a hole in the wall wore a crimson stain in her eyes; and like a weight on her soul rested that same stain, dyeing it through and through.

In an agony of despair before which even the wounded men held their peace, the unhappy girl flung herself on the ground, weeping, sobbing, almost strangling with the same hysterical wail repeated over and over again: "I have killed him! I have killed him!" till it seemed as if her girlish figure were being fairly torn in pieces by the violence of the emotion which convulsed it, and she hardly heard a feeble voice in French close to her ear:

"Ma petite mademoiselle, n'afflige toi pas je t'en pries. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a maintenant? Il est mort, lui? Diable! ça n'importe pas quand on souffre tant."

In his kindly effort at consolation the

sergeant stretched out his cold hand, and strove to pat the prostrate girl on the shoulder; but Twitters never lifted her head, though her pitiful cry sounded more feeble; and the exertion, slight as it was, had exhausted the poor sergeant's little strength. When he next spoke it was in a strange, guttural whisper.

“*Ma petite—de grâce, donnez-moi de l'eau !*”

Something in the tone roused Twitters from her abandonment of despair. She staggered to her feet, and, still sobbing, mixed a little brandy and water, and held it to the man's lips; but though he tried to swallow, tried again, it was in vain, and he put it from him murmuring: “*Je ne puis plus. Merci, ma petite—mais—c'en est fini.*” Then, seeing dimly the hopeless anguish in the girl's white face, he strove to

press her hand, adding, "*Adieu, donc. Ce n'est pas difficile—la mort ;*" and turning his head so as to lean it on her shoulder, stretched out his limbs in one long shivering spasm, and died.

When, five minutes later, Sister Gertrude, with Miss Curtis and a young Englishman belonging to the Geneva corps, appeared on the scene with a cart full of bedding and comforts for the wounded, they found Twitters seated on the floor between the two dead men, with the sergeant's head on her bosom, and repeating with dreary monotony :

"I have killed him! *I have killed him!*"

CHAPTER IX.

FOR more than a week after the day recorded in our last chapter Amy Travers lay on a bed of fever and sickness, watched over and carefully tended by Miss Curtis, who hardly left her day or night. Little did the good spinster think when she arrived at Metz that the principal nursing she was to do there would be for her young companion ; but so it was. "Man proposes but God disposes;" and for two or three days life and death hung so evenly in the balance with our little traveller, that Miss Curtis was fairly distraught lest she might

have to return to England alone, and meet Mrs. Wyndham's reproachful gaze with the tidings of her favourite's death. Over and over again she reproached herself for ever having allowed Twitters to accompany her to France ; and registered repeated, if silent vows, that should the girl recover, she would lose no time in taking her safely home again. This, however, was more easily said than done ; and when Twitters began to mend, her recovery, thanks to youth and a good constitution, was so rapid, and her desire to stay where she was and live down the blunders of that first day so ardent, that considering the extreme difficulty of travelling in the then disturbed state of the country, Miss Curtis allowed herself to be persuaded to remain day after day, fancying with each new sunrise that she would see the capitulation of the city before it sank

again to the west, and destined with every sunset to a fresh disappointment.

It was one chilly afternoon, about ten days after *Twitters* was about and well again, that five people might have been seen descending a stony path leading down the slope of *Merci-le-haut*. They were very different in appearance from one another : a tall, brown-skinned, lusty peasant woman with a six-months-old baby in her arms ; a nun in blue serge and flapping cap ; a young lady all in grey with a red cross on her breast, and also wearing a rather nun-like appearance save for the shine of golden hair rippling about her brow ; and a sturdy, big-eyed little lad of seven, whom she was holding by the hand. The two last mentioned women—*Sister Gertrude* and our *Twitters*, for whom she had taken a great fancy—had been to the observatory, on the

brow of the hill, to see whether they could discern anything of the sortie which, according to current rumours, Marshal Bazaine was intending to make on that day, and which the Prussians seemed to expect would be on a larger scale than any of the previous ones; and it was while on the summit that they had been joined by the peasant woman and her children, the former of whom accosted Sister Gertrude at once, begging her to come to their assistance, and informing her between floods of tears that their cottage in the village of Vaux had been burnt that morning by a small party of tipsy Uhlans, who had quarrelled with her husband for rashly avowing his French proclivities, dangerously wounded him, and beaten her brother till he lay senseless and covered with bruises at her feet.

“For God’s sake, *ma sœur*, come with

me, and see if you, who are so clever, cannot help my poor husband," cried the weeping woman. "My neighbours have all deserted their homes, my two elder children are lying sick of the fever which has decimated the place : lying in the roadway, see you, now they have no house; and even my poor *bon homme* and *petit Pierre* have no roof over their heads, and may die of their wounds without someone to attend to them. For the love of Heaven hasten with me, *ma sœur*."

"Most willingly," said the good Sister, turning on the instant; "by good fortune I am free for the moment, and can go with you. *Sœur Aimée*" (so she called Twitters), "have you got my leather-bag? *Allons donc*. I shall do more good probably at the village of Vaux than in watching for this sortie which Maréchal

Bazaine does not seem to intend making after all."

Twitters took it for granted she was to go too, and gave her hand cheerfully to the tired-looking little boy to help him along. By herself she now never attempted to do anything. Her nerves were still too much shaken to allow her to trust to them for a moment ; but to obey orders under Sister Gertrude, or any other good woman, was quite a different matter. She had learnt a bitter lesson from her late humiliating experience, that acting on her own responsibility she was rather worse than useless ; but nothing pleased her so much as to be made a messenger and handmaid by wiser and more skilful nurses ; and in these capacities her quickness, sympathy, and zeal had brought her into very general request and helpfulness.

They were just commencing the descent of the hill now when a shot rang out on the damp, chilly air, and the peasant woman turning round exclaimed :

“ *Mais v’la donc ! Ou fait de sortie là bas. Dame ! quelle foule noire !* ”

A black crowd, indeed ! A sortie such as has never been seen since those far back days of old when the Roman virgins were sent forth from the city to implore pity from the victorious Coriolanus : a sortie, the last resource of a brave general most ungratefully requited by a most ungrateful people, and who, unable to bear the sight of the crowd of starving wretches pent up within the walls, the herd of men, women, and children, all famishing with hunger, and all imploring him night and day to terminate their sufferings by the surrender of the city, had sent them out from the

gates with a flag of truce, in the hope that their hollow cheeks, their wasted limbs, and the gaunt wolf of hunger glaring from their sunken eyes, might move the pity of the conquering enemy, and induce him to allow these harmless foes to pass outside the lines investing the beleaguered city. A vain hope, indeed; for, like Coriolanus, the Red Prince knew only too well that the fall of the city which had so long held him at bay depended on the voice of that very hungry multitude within its walls, and that were *they* allowed to go free the gallant old marshal of France and his brave soldiers would gladly starve, like the rats on which they were even now feeding, or blow themselves up in the ruins of the fortress, rather than surrender it into the hands of a foreign invader. Too well, indeed, the shrewd

soldier knew this, and our young English girl standing on the hill-side saw, without understanding what was taking place, the hapless multitude driven back to their prison of despair; saw their intrepid spokesman—a woman like herself, but a woman rendered fearless by famine—standing all alone, until daunted at last by her solitary position and the bayonets bristling in her face, she too turned and followed her heart-broken companions back to the city which was at once their refuge and their dungeon. By this time our little group was almost at the bottom of the hill, and Sister Gertrude stopping, said :

“*Sœur Aimée*, should you be afraid to return to the camp alone? I do not know that you will be of use where I am going, and you can take a message to the reverend mother for me. Besides,

the Frau Curtees will be alarmed at your not returning. I promised her I would never take you away again without telling her."

"But, Sister, I hoped I could help you—I——"

"But, my child, I do not think you can."

"Am I so useless, then?" And the blue eyes of the mortified girl became dazzled with tears. Sister Gertrude saw them, and laid her hand gently on her *protégée's* shoulder.

"Nay, not so, indeed; you are only young and inexperienced, while I, see you, have been twenty years a nurse to the sick; and even now sometimes I feel faint and terrified at what I see. You are a tender child, and ought not to have been taken from your house-fire."

"Yes, I was some good *there*," sighed Twitters, bitterly, and for a moment she wondered with regretful shame-faced surprise what had ever induced her to rush into a position which she was totally unable to fill. But, alas! where else could she go now? Rex was at Gorseleigh, and while she loved him as she still felt she did she could never look in his face again. Sister Gertrude reiterated her wishes more earnestly.

"It is a long way to Vaux," she said. "I may possibly be detained all night, and the Frau Curtees would be in an anguish for you. Here you are not a mile from our ambulance, and there is always work there for a dozen pair of hands in a thousand ways, which your willing little ones have already found out, as I know well. Go, my child, do not delay, and pull your

hood well over your face. You are too pretty for the soldiers' eyes, good and steady as our men are in general."

Twitters blushed deeply. In truth she had never thought of her own fairness till Rex told her how fair she was in his eyes; and now she heard her beauty commented on on every side; sometimes, indeed, in a manner embarrassing enough to bring the hot blood to her very temples, and make her wish to creep behind the skirts of some strong matronly protector. With these feelings she began to grow rather nervous when, after walking about a quarter of a mile, she heard the jingle of arms in front, and knew, by the buzz of voices and tramp of many feet, that a detachment of soldiers was just in front of her. They were coming to meet her, too, and some in the van were laughing and joking, in coarse, rough voices, which

reached her ears, and made the girl shrink and slacken in her pace lest she should come up with and get entangled in their ranks.

Uncertain what to do she paused, and glancing round hailed the sight of a gate opening out of the hedge into a deep narrow lane on the further side. She had never noticed the latter before, but it appeared to lead in much the same direction as the road, and had the advantage of looking solitary and retired. True, it might be more roundabout, it might even lead her a little out of her way, but at this moment the troops were close to the bend in the road which hid her from their view, and she herself could see the tips of their bayonets and the black eagle waving over their heads. Even if she stood still she would be in the midst of them

in another moment, and acting on the impulse of timidity she turned, tried the gate, found it sunk too deeply in the clay to open, and climbing over it with a country girl's lightness and agility, plunged into the muddy lane on the other side.

It was the 25th of October, and a day unexampled for damp, dreary gloominess. A leaden sky hung overhead, closing down on all sides like a grey, funereal pall; while down in the valley a wet, white mist clung round the lanes and hedges, and was broken now and then by a cold north wind bearing on it a small, sharp, driving rain which chilled our little girl through and through, and filled her with a dreary presentment of evil which she found it impossible to shake off; and far off, from the direction of Metz, came a dropping fire of musketry, scaring the last poor stragglers back to the shelter

of the guns of St. Quentin ; while now and then the sullen roar of cannon boomed out upon the heavy air.

But in the lane along which Twitters trudged all was as still and quiet as if no hostile armies were within a dozen miles. The yellow leaves of the melancholy poplar trees met overhead, and the rain-drops pattered between them, and now and then a withered leaf floated off and fell, weighted with moisture, on the sticky soil, making a dank carpet of foliage underfoot. On and on she walked, now taking a turn to the right, and now to the left, according as the lane she was following branched in either direction, but ever wandering as she believed in the direction of the camp until the continued stillness, and the conviction gradually forced upon her that she must have walked at least a couple of miles,

made her feel uneasy; and she was just deliberating what to do when of a sudden she came in sight of an object which chilled her veins with horror.

At the junction of three cross lanes a Prussian cuirassier was hanging to a tree with his throat cut, his hands chopped off at the wrists, and his uniform lying in a little ensanguined heap at his feet!

For one moment Twitters stood as if frozen to the spot, gazing with wide, affrighted eyes at the ghastly apparition. Then she uttered one wild cry and fled—fled anywhere, she cared not in what direction so only that she could escape from a sight, the sickening brutality of which had nearly turned her brain.

“*Halte là!*”

It was a rough, imperative voice of command which brought her at last to a

sudden, breathless stop. She was at the outskirts of a ruined hamlet, and right in front of her stood a grim, bearded fellow in a blouse, and carrying a rifle over his arm. Twitters started back, and gazed at him in frightened bewilderment.

Where had she come? Where was the camp? And who this strange, rough-looking peasant soldier, and those others, similarly accoutred, now creeping out of one or two of the dilapidated houses? She had never seen any like them in the Prussian army; and the dialect in which they spoke to one another, though strange and hard to follow, was undoubtedly a French *patois*. One word repeated by several of them, as they gathered round her, she clearly understood—"Prussienne!"

"Non, non—*Anglaise!*" cried Twitters, becoming more alarmed as she noted the

sinister expression on almost all of the dark, hairy faces ; but her reply only provoked an incredulous smile ; and one of the men touched her shining yellow hair, which, loosened in her headlong flight, had fallen in a waving cascade over her shoulders, and grinned unpleasantly at his next neighbour. Twitters did not like the look of this man at all. He had a heavy, sensual, lowering face, and small ferret eyes which seemed to look her over, and gloat on her as a cat might over a mouse. Decidedly, the sooner she got away from him and his party the better ; and with this object she stepped back a pace, and with a faint, colourless attempt at a smile, said in her best French :

“I have missed my way, friends. Can you tell me the nearest road to the camp?”

“The Prussian camp?” asked the one

of the party who impressed her most disagreeably.

"Yes," the girl stammered faintly, feeling somehow that the admission was against her, but unable to make any other reply.

Again the men looked at one another, and the spokesman answered :

"Mademoiselle is three miles from the Prussian camp : much too far for her pretty little feet to walk."

"But I am not tired, and I must get there — quickly," cried *Twitters*, more alarmed by the compliment, and the look which accompanied it, than ever. "I belong to the Geneva corps ; you can see my cross. Do you not know us, the English nurses ? Pray don't stop me. Pray, pray let me go. Even if you are French, you do not war with women."

“No; it is the Germans who do that,” said one of the men. “Look here, *ma fille*; here is a pretty sight! Truly we are to be lambs and the accursed Prussians wolves. *Ah! ça*—what think you of that?”

Despite Twitters’ great unwillingness, she had been half led, half pushed to the door of a cottage, and now saw, lying on the floor, the body of a girl—a girl young and fair as herself—but dead, and with a rifle-bullet through her breast.

“It was a Prussian cuirassier did that, M’dmoiselle,” said the man, sternly; “did it because she would not betray her father, a Franc-tireur like ourselves, in his hiding-place. Do you know what has arrived to that Prussian cuirassier, the brave man?”

“Ah! in pity let me go,” cried Twitters,

paling more and more, and trembling like a leaf. "It is dreadful—horrible. This is a war of demons, not men ; but *I* have done you no harm. Have mercy on me, let me go !"

"That M'demoiselle may tell her compatriots that a body of Franc-tireurs are lurking in the village of Bar-le-Croix !" said the sinister-eyed soldier. "Truly we are lambs. *Our* girls are tracked down and shot like the beasts of the field, while we are to let the German demoiselles pass unhurt where they please ! Does the pretty damsel take us for fools or babies ?"

Twitters could understand *him* only too well ; and turning suddenly from him to the eldest of the party, a sombre, grey-bearded man, who had not spoken,

"Have mercy on me !" she cried, sinking on her knees, and clasping his hard

hand in the fervency of her appeal. "You are old; you have had sisters, daughters, perhaps, of your own. Let me go. I am only a helpless girl. I would not betray you or do you harm. I swear it solemnly. Ah! if you believe in God, if you have a heart, show me my way and let me go."

"Let the child go, Pierre," said the man roughly, but as if touched by the appeal. "See you, she is but a babe, and she belongs to the good *sœurs de charité*. There is no harm in them."

"Nay, if she is English as she says," replied Pierre, "they are all heretics—Protestants who revile our good sisters, and wear the cross only in mockery and as a disguise."

"Mademoiselle is not a Protestant, I am sure," said the elder man, "is she?" He looked full at Twitters, and she, true as

steel, though frightened nearly to death, answered clearly :

“Yes.”

“*Voilà donc !* as I told you,” cried Pierre. “The English are all heretics ; and all Prussians in heart, or Germans, which is the same. They have a German Queen. Their princess is married to the son of the Emperor William. *Và !* they *are* Germans. It is all one.”

“Still, she is a nurse for the sick, and has sworn not to betray us,” said the other, while a low murmur from those around testified that the tears and beauty of Twitters were not without effect.

“See, then, I am not a stone,” replied Pierre, with a coarse laugh. “If you will, let her go ; but first Mademoiselle shall give us each a kiss of gratitude, and then I myself will accompany her home. Am I

not complaisant ?" and he looked round on his fellows with a grin, which was repeated on nearly every face. The proposal was evidently pleasing to his audience. Not so to the captive ; and as the sense of it fell upon her ear she sprang like a deer on one side, and darting past her foes, fled down the village street with a speed which only desperation could have given her.

For one moment, poor child ! she fancied she was free ; and as she ran she shrieked frantically for aid. Alas ! only Pierre's voice replied. Run as she may no woman can outrun a man. She has neither the strength nor the practice ; and so Twitters found. In two minutes the Franc-tireur was at her side ; in another he had caught her in his sinewy arms and held her panting, struggling, screaming, her lovely face flushed, her soft lips gasping

apart, her eyes dazzled and distended with tears, her tiny hands striving to beat and tear and rend herself free, while he shouted :

“Come then, *camarades*! Six kisses a piece instead of one to punish her. Ah! *petite traîtresse*, you deserve to be strangled for that run, but as you are so lovely I will only——”

CRACK!

Even as the jeering words were being uttered they died upon his lips. His arms dropped at his side. He sprang straight up into the air and fell like a log on the ground, while Twitters, stunned by the sudden report, dizzy and faint with terror and struggling, found herself lifted in two strong arms, and heard a voice, which sounded to her like an angel from heaven, say,

“Twitters! My own darling, my little love! Safe, safe, safe! Thank God!”

Her senses seemed reeling; but she looked up, recognised Rex Wyndham's fair English face bending over her, felt his arms round her, saw a troop of blue-coated Prussians sweeping past, heard the crack, crack, crack, of rifles as they pursued the flying foe, and fell back in a long, deadly swoon on her lover's breast.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Twitters recovered, which was not for a long while, not till she was safe in her own tent, with her head resting on Rex's shoulder, and both her hands clasped in his, while Miss Curtis sat beside her, crying with mingled gratitude and agitation, her first idea was that she was dreaming, and that her lover would disappear as soon as she awoke; her next, that she *had* just awakened, and that it was the past string of horrible events which formed the dream. Indeed, her senses were so scattered that it was a long time before she could collect them sufficiently to under-

stand what had happened, or enquire how it was that Rex had arrived so opportunely for her salvation; while he, for his part, had such a long story to relate, and was so divided between his desire to tell it, and his still greater need of pitying and caressing his recovered darling (not to speak of the anxiety which both he and Miss Curtis felt to hear *her* story) that it was a considerable time before anyone understood anything clearly.

Gradually, however, and by degrees, Twitters did manage to gather the startling tidings that Rex and Miss Scott were parted, parted for good and all. It seemed that the young man's suspicions had been raised, almost against his own will, by Adelaide's very peculiar language in reference to the man who he had discovered to be hanging about the house

making enquiries about her, and that these suspicions had been increased by the almost discourteous haste with which she and her brother set about making preparations for immediate departure. Before they could carry these into effect, however, the individual who had occasioned them, and who seemed to have made himself acquainted with their design, made his appearance boldly at the Hall; thereby creating unbounded horror in the breasts of both Adelaide and her brother, who, as it appeared, had been for some while back enjoying the pleasing idea that he had departed from this world.

The lady, indeed, might well feel overwhelmed at the sight of him; for not only was he palpably alive and in robust health, but he speedily produced certain papers proving him to be no other than the legal possessor

of that hand which Rex was so soon expecting to be obliged to claim as his own, and Miss Scott not to be Miss Scott at all, but Mrs. Hiram Bolshover, in consequence of a private marriage contracted with the owner of that name some ten years previously. Adelaide had soon tired of her fancy for him, especially when she found out that he was as poor as a rat, and quite unable to pay for the gratification of her somewhat expensive caprices in the way of dress and living; and he, being equally disgusted with her, had easily agreed to an arrangement by which, with the assistance of Captain Scott, a separation was concluded, and his permanent absence from his wife bought and paid for. The money so laid out, however, had been expended long since, and Mr. Bolshover determined to run over from the States

and try to extract an additional sum by a visit to his heartless spouse ; and having found out, not only how she and her brother had been passing their time on the Continent, but that she was now on the verge of marriage with a wealthy young Englishman, he quietly resolved on keeping himself in the background until just before the ceremony, and then either putting on the screw for more money, or unmasking her before her intended and his family, as his judgment or fancy might dictate. Having discovered that his presence was known, and being tolerably acquainted with the Scotts' cleverness, he had decided on the latter course, and it need hardly be said that Sir Wyndham Wyndham lost no time in handing over to his arms both his bride and her brother, although the former vehemently protested that the

marriage was both illegal and had long been dissolved, and went into violent hysterics ; while her brother made a great show of virtuous indignation, and attempted to treat the American as a scoundrel who had once tried ineffectually to entrap his innocent sister into a marriage, and whom he had long believed to be dead and buried.

It was all to no effect, however, Rex indignantly declining to hold any further communication with a lady who the papers he held satisfactorily proved to be another man's wife, and who had deceived him from first to last ; while Mrs. Wyndham locked herself in her own rooms to avoid even seeing her daughter-in-law that was to have been ; and the Baronet thundered out :

“Then if the marriage was illegal the sooner you prove it so the better ; and all

I've got to say is, that if you, Mr. What's-your-name, or your Jezebel of a wife, or that consummate swindler and blackguard your brother-in-law, ever enter my grounds again, or attempt to annoy any member of my family on any pretence whatsoever, I'll have you prosecuted before the county court. Aye, sir, that I will. No fear!" A threat which, though possibly futile, had the effect of inducing the unhallowed trio to leave Gorseleigh with all the speed and privacy the Wyndhams could have desired. As Adelaide said to her brother when they were alone: "The game's up, Bertie, and a public *exposé* will only ruin us and not hurt them. We had better quit." And apparently Captain Scott was of the same opinion, for he gave in to it without any demur, and exerted himself so promptly to carry it

out, that the couple departed by the very next train.

And Rex? Well, I suppose it is needless to dilate on the gratitude he experienced at his unexpected release. Nevertheless, after all that had occurred, and the comparative publicity of his engagement, he found it rather unpleasant to remain at Gorseleigh for the present; and, as the pleasantest mode of travelling in that autumn of trouble and excitement, did like so many others among our idle young men, donned the red cross, and, joining the Geneva corps, journeyed down by Sedan, S  arbruck, Vionville, and Strasbourg, seeing all there was to see, and a great deal more than he had ever dreamt of in the way of horrors and suffering, and lending a strong arm and a helping hand wherever it was needed.

At Strasbourg he learnt the astounding tidings that Miss Curtis and Twitters had been there, instead of being, as he believed, in Switzerland, where, indeed, only a sense of false shame and embarrassment had prevented his following them ; but when he further discovered that they had actually gone on to Metz, where the war was still raging, he cast shamefacedness to the winds, and, abandoning everything else, followed with all speed in their track. Arrived at the Prussian camp, he soon found out Miss Curtis, and, being sent by her in search of his little love, fell in with a detachment of soldiers bent on unearthing a party of Franc-tireurs, who were supposed to have slain and brutally mutilated a Prussian cuirassier, and to be still ambushed in the neighbourhood. Rex joined them, partly for the excitement of

the thing, and partly because they were going in his direction, and he was getting anxious at not meeting Twitters and Sister Gertrude. He was positively with the detachment from whose approach the poor girl beat such a hasty retreat, little thinking that she was actually flying from the person dearest to her on earth ; and—the rest we know ! How grateful both he and Twitters felt that he had arrived in time to rescue her, no tongue can tell ; nor surely is it needed to do so. Suffice it to add that the following day saw our three travellers on their way home amid the salvos of artillery and thundering cheers which proclaimed the fall of Metz and the triumphal entry of the German army into the city which had so long and bravely held out against them : thunders which shook the air for miles, and made Twitters’

heart flutter like a frightened bird as she clung to Rex's arm and whispered :

“Thank God it is over, and that you are with me. Oh ! Rex, I ought never to have come. No girl should, who is not fully trained and prepared for such a life. I was safe at home ; but yesterday, if you had not come, where should I have been now ?”

A question Rex could not even bear to contemplate ; nor could he feel perfectly at ease until his darling was again, as she said, safe at home in the dear old house where she had grown up, and with the three people who cared most for her in the world. That was in the last week of October, and it was at the beginning of the next year that I happened to be staying at Gorseleigh, and was told by Sir Wyndham Wyndham, with a broad grin

on his wrinkled old face, that the young couple were to be married in the spring unless something happened to delay it, or one of them changed their mind; an event which, considering their then painfully spoony condition, he did not consider at all likely. "By George, no, not in the least. No fear!"

THE END.

LADY BETTY.

"She was not as pretty as women I know."—Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

LADY BETTY.



CHAPTER I.

HER FIRST DINNER PARTY.

“BUT do you think she was in earnest?”

“Oh, yes; she was *quite* in earnest, and gave me a long talk about it.”

“Poor Betty!”

“Bother pitying Betty! I think it would be great fun.”

“Yes, I’m sure *I* should like it.”

“Ah, but then you’re not ugly like I am, and mamma wouldn’t be vexed every time she looked at you.”

“Well, but Betty, you needn’t look at her, and, after all, you’re not so *very* ugly, you know.

"If your nose didn't turn up quite so much. It's that unfortunate nose of yours, Betty."

"And her forehead. Don't you think, Louis, she ought to pull some of the hairs out every day until the party! Of course, it would hurt; but it is so awfully low."

"You silly! It would leave a scarlet ring as if somebody had tried to scalp her. Perhaps if she had done it long ago it might have improved her. I heard of a man doing it once. He was a master at our school, and the matron told me of it: said she used to hear him groaning every morning as he pulled the hairs out. First time she thought he'd got a fit of the colic, and rushed in with a bottle of mustard in one hand, and the brandy in the other."

"Louis! you're inventing."

"I'm not. You ask Hal. The man was

in love with someone, and she wouldn't have him because he'd less than half an inch of forehead, said it showed a want of moral thingumbobs or something of that sort. I say, Lady Betty, if you do go in for it you'll have to wait till school begins again. I'm not going to be woke up of a morning by your groans and moans."

"But, Louis, I wouldn't do it for the world. It must hurt dreadfully to make a man cry out that way. Besides, no one wants to marry me. Oh, dear!"

"Never mind, sister dear. I fink your forehead's nice, and your nose too; an' I likes 'em 'cause I likes you much betterer than Constance—I do."

"That's right, Val! Stand up for your colours—rather dingy colours, eh, Betty old girl? Not quite the '*drapeau blanc*,' or the red, white, and blue of old England,

which some fellow in my regiment said ought to be found in every woman's face; but Val's right. What does it matter as long as we like you? And you're well enough in other respects, you know—that is, if you were a little taller.”

“But—thank you, Lyon, all the same—only one's nose and forehead and complexion and height are such a *lot* of one altogether, and it is dreadful to be so ugly,” says Betty, in a very quenched little voice, with a tremble at the end of it; and Val flings himself suddenly on her neck, and shouts out:

“You're not ugly. I'll kick anyone what says you are—there!”

They are all gathered in the large, untidy, semi-comfortable school-room at the back of Wargrave House, Wargrave Square, Bloomsbury, the town residence of Mr. Francis Grant-Cholmondeley, his wife, and

family: six young Cholmondeleys, from Lionel, the heir-apparent, who, with his undress uniform and ensign's commission, is a far greater and more military personage among his brothers and sisters than H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, to little Val, the baby of four, just promoted to the glory of a sailor collar and tiny blue serge garments with pockets in them—pockets into which he plunges his small fat hands with a delight passing all expression, and which he has already filled with all manner of treasures, from nurse's best thimble (for which she is vainly searching upstairs) to a half-melted lump of sugar, cribbed at five o'clock tea, and two new farthings.

They have rather a way of congregating in the schoolroom, though Lionel, the soldier, and Elizabeth, or Betty as everybody but her mother has always called her, are of

an age to be above that resort ; and Master Val's proper abode is the nursery, except at meals, and during a certain two hours in the morning, when he is supposed to be brought down for the purpose of studying c, a, t, cat, and d, o, g, dog, under Miss Masters, the certificated governess ; but the rest of the house, especially the drawing-room, sacred to Mrs. Grant-Cholmondeley, is so stately and cheerless that even Lionel, when on a visit, is glad to put his dignity in his pocket, and escape from it as soon as possible. There are circumstances, too, which have made poor Betty, though an eldest daughter, far more at home in the school-room—from which, indeed, she has been only lately promoted—than in her mother's society ; while Val is not to be kept from any place where sister Betty is to be found, still less when that place is for the time

made additionally jovial by the presence of the two schoolboy brothers at home for their Easter holidays.

These two are at present stretched on the rug in front of the fire, twisting their legs and bodies about like young eels, and indulging in a little mild wrestling and head-punching at intervals, rather to the distress of pretty Constance of sixteen, who sits swinging herself to-and-fro in a much-abused rocking-chair, with hardly any seat left in it, and looking admiringly up at Lionel, her hero brother and idol. Val nearly upsets her in his impetuous rush at Betty, and it is only when those two are cuddling one another on the wide window-seat on which Betty had dropped after her first dejected entrance, that Constance exclaims laughingly :

“ Well, it’s rather absurd that I, who

would like to go to a grand dinner-party, should have to stay in the schoolroom and wear frocks without any whalebone in them, because mamma thinks I oughtn't to have a figure, while Lady Betty there, who hates going out, and always would hate it if she were eight-and-twenty instead of eighteen, and is nearly crying about it now, I believe, should be made to go to a really swell party, and wear a beautiful evening dress, and look——”

“Hideous!” puts in Lady Betty in a small, sorrowful voice from behind Val's curls. “That's it, Connie—that and knowing mamma is thinking about it the whole time. Oh! I wish you were going instead.”

It is the one “excellent thing” in Lady Betty that she has a voice which even Shakespeare would have admired—low and sweet, with a sweetness which has the ring

of some musical instrument, and which has caused strangers to turn round and look at her more than once, and then turn hastily away, thinking : " What a pity that such a voice should belong to so plain a little person ! " Just now it is so plaintive that Lionel, sitting on the edge of the table, bursts out laughing, and stretches out a patronising hand to pat her small dark head.

" Poor old Bettina ! Dinner-parties are a delusion, and life delighteth her no more. She shall go into a convent, she shall, and turn up her poor little nose at the world in the odour of sanctity. Never mind, my child, you'll find it better than you expect. Ten to one nobody will look at you at all, and if you're only decently dressed the other girls will be much more ready to admire you than if you were pretty enough to be a rival to them."

“Oh yes, I wonder what you will wear,” cries Constance, springing up and coming over to the window-seat. “It must be some decided colour, Betty, because of your complexion. Yellow would look the best, yellow tarlatan, I suppose, with General Jacquemineau roses to give you some colour. You know—those dark-red, velvety ones, and then if you don’t wear a low dress, and if your hair is done very nicely—oh, Lyon, I dare say she’ll look nice enough. Don’t you remember how well she looked as the gipsy in that long orange-coloured dressing-gown at the children’s party Mrs. Thornton gave last Christmas?”

“But I am going to wear white, not yellow,” says Betty, quietly, and is greeted with a shriek from Lyon and Constance.

“*White!* My dear, you’ll look like a chimney-sweep.”

Betty nods her head.

“Yes, I know, but I can’t help it. Mamma says so. She said white was the proper thing for a girl to wear at her *début*, if not through the whole of her first season, and therefore I was to wear it. We are to go to Madame Renaud to-morrow morning about it.”

“To-morrow? I thought the dinner-party was not for a fortnight.”

“No more it is, but you know how busy Madame Renaud is, and mamma says that she hopes it will never be held up as a reproach against her that her daughter’s unfortunate appearance could be in any way attributed to *her* want of maternal care and affection.” Betty says this in the quietest of little voices, but I am afraid there is a touch of mimicry in it, for Constance and Lyon go off into peals of unfilial laughter,

from which the latter recovers herself to exclaim :

“The Mater seems to have come out strong to-day. Did she give you a lecture on the subject of your first season ? Ha ! I thought so. What fun ! And why on earth do you blush about it so ? It must have been rich. I wish I had been there to hear. Can’t you tell us what she said—‘that she trusted modesty of deportment would be your prevailing characteristic,’ and that you were never to waltz twice running with the same person ?”

“No, not that. She said—oh ! I don’t mind telling you about it—that now I was eighteen it was quite time for me to come out, and that therefore she intended to devote this entire season to introducing me, and had signified the same to her friends ; that of course it was a great disappointment

that her eldest daughter should be so unfortunately plain and unattractive in every way ; that she felt it to be one of those mysterious dispensations of Providence, which were the harder to bear, because she could not see that either my father or herself were to blame for my having inherited these peculiarities of form and face ; but that, nevertheless, she meant to do her duty with that strict justice and impartiality which she had always made a point of showing to her children——”

“ Very strict justice sometimes,” observed Lyon. “ Poor old Betty ! Go on. I’m afraid you didn’t feel very happy under this peroration,” and Lady Betty looks up at him with tears in her eyes.

“ No, Lyon, I didn’t, and I begged her to put off my coming out till next year, and let Connie and me do it together, for nobody

would notice me then, and I should like it so much better. Indeed, I didn't mind if I never came out at all; but mamma was quite shocked at the notion, and said I must know her *very* little if I imagined she would suffer anyone's private feelings, even her own, to interfere with the proper code of society respecting girls of my position; that it was usual to keep one's daughters strictly in the schoolroom till their education was completed" (a groan from Constance), "and then to introduce the eldest alone, take her about to balls and parties, see that she is well dressed and has none but suitable partners and acquaintances, have her presented at Court" ("Oh, Betty, how jolly for you! But you'll be sure to tumble over your train!"), "allow her to assist in the entertainment of any friends who might be invited down to the country for the shoot-

ing" (another groan, this time from Louis ; "That is beastly—there'll be no fun in the summer holidays if Betty is to be a fine lady then as well"), "and if possible marry her to some proper and desirable person before the next season commenced ; and—— Oh ! Lyon, please don't laugh. That is what she means to do with me, and she trusts that I will co-operate with her endeavours and wishes in every respect."

"In other words, lay yourself out submissively to angle for the 'proper and desirable person'—eh, Betty ? Oh, the Mater !"

But Betty shakes her head reprovingly.

"No ; mamma would not like any of us to do *that*, but if anyone she likes can be got to like me I am to marry him, of course ; and one thing she is quite determined on, she won't have two girls to take out at the

same time, especially two as different as Connie and I am. She says they would mutually hurt one another, though I'm sure I can't see how ; and that therefore if her labours and wishes on my behalf do not show *any* sign of being rewarded by the beginning of next season, she thinks I had better not come up to town at all, but spend the summer on a visit to Aunt Katharine at St. Ursula's."

"By Jove ! you don't say so. That is, if the 'proper and desirable,' &c., doesn't appear or can't be brought up to the mark, you are to be sent to hide your diminished head in Aunt Katharine's sisterhood, and leave the field vacant for Connie's performances. Upon my word, Betty, I think I must come to the rescue, and find someone for you."

But Betty shakes her head again. There

has been no mimicry this time, hardly any sense of humour in her repetition of her mother's exordium. She tells it all in a quiet matter-of-fact voice, with a little touch of pathos at the end, which, however, is only because she is sorry that her ugliness will even prohibit her from seeing pretty Constance's *début*, and assisting at her triumphs, after the failure of her own thus mortifyingly sketched; and the others listen with a little commonplace amusement and compassion, but nothing more. Mamma has always been the same—icily conventional, magniloquent, and iron-bound—and Betty has always been the ugly duckling of the family. Both are mere matters of fact, and they are very matter-of-fact young people, all of them, and are given to discussing in a cool and common-sense manner many of those family and social

arrangements which, equally in force in other houses, are wont to be concealed under a decent veil of non-recognition. Indeed, Constance has just said in the calmest way :

“ I suppose if you get *engaged*, Betty, you won't be sent to Aunt Katharine's, and then we could go out together,” when the schoolroom-door opens, and a good-tempered voice exclaims :

“ Constance, my dear, what *are* you talking about ? Who is that on the table ? Oh, Mr. Lionel, are you there ? I could not make you out.”

“ We are all here, Miss Masters,” says Lady Betty, rising up out of the window-seat, her dark head and narrow shoulders showing suddenly against the faint yellow of an evening sky, and Val still in her arms, where he has fallen

asleep, "except the fire, and that has gone out, I am afraid. Hal, ring for it to be lighted. We forgot all about it, talking. By-the-way, isn't it time to dress for dinner?"

"Past seven! Good gracious! yes," cried Lionel. "How d'you do, Miss Masters? Don't tell anybody you found me here. It's the only comfortable room in the house, you know. Well, good-bye, youngsters. Good-bye, Betty, my child."

"Oh, Lyon, aren't you going to dine here? Do!"

"Can't, dear; got an engagement at a quarter to eight sharp. I ought to be on my way there already." And Lyon's long legs go tearing upstairs, while Betty follows, much more slowly, with her rosy, ponderous burden.

"How I wish I were a nursemaid or something of that sort, and could stay happily with the children, and not come out at all!" is the burden of the young lady's thoughts.

END OF VOL. II.



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